INTERVIEW WITH LYN NOFZIGER

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Interviewers

University of Virginia

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Knott: Thank you for agreeing to do this, Mr. Nofziger. I guess we’ll just jump right into it. We thought we would focus less on the gubernatorial years and more on the presidential.

Nofziger: That’s too bad. The place where I am kind of unique is the Reagan gubernatorial campaign, because most of these people came in afterwards. The only person I can think of who’s left from that in particular is Stu Spencer. All the fat cats are dead, and most of the others—people like Ed Meese and Bill Clark—came in after the election. I beg your pardon, Bill Clark did not. Bill Clark was the Ventura County chairman, but he was kind of isolated, whereas I was with Reagan that whole time. But we can talk about whatever you want.

Knott: I have reconsidered.

Nofziger: No, no, whatever you want to talk about.

Knott: We like to take our cue from the respondent. So let’s spend some time on California.

Riley: Absolutely. Let’s start there and see where we go.

Knott: Why don’t you start us off by talking about that 1966 campaign and how you became involved?

Nofziger: I had not expected to ever get into politics. I was the national politics reporter for the Copley newspapers, the big papers in San Diego and around L.A. and in Illinois, including Springfield. But I had known Reagan’s brother, Neil Reagan, from the 1964 [Barry] Goldwater campaign, which I had covered. Neil was the television advisor for Barry Goldwater.

Neil always denied this, but I’m certain in my own mind that when Reagan decided to run for Governor and they were looking for a press secretary, Neil recommended me because we’d gotten to be pretty good friends on that campaign. There aren’t very many Republican reporters around, and they were looking for somebody who knew the press and so forth. So they had come to me and asked me to do it, and I had told them no and turned them down two or three times.

They finally went to Jim Copley, who owned the papers, and asked him to ask me if I would do it, and I did. The Copley people thought, of course, Well, Reagan was an actor, and he was in this, and he would probably lose the primary, and I could come back to Washington and start
writing politics again. Of course, he won the primary overwhelmingly and went on to win the general, and I had, at Reagan’s request, decided to stay in the Governor’s office.

**Riley:** It just occurred to me. I didn’t know that Reagan’s brother had any political interests.

**Nofziger:** Reagan’s brother was, among other things, one of the group of a hundred who went to Dick Nixon and asked him to run for Congress against somebody—[Horace] Jerry Voorhis, in 1958, I think. So he had an interest in politics. He was a vice president with McCann-Erickson, a big advertising firm, and he was a Republican long before Ronald Reagan was. Yes, he had a definite interest. I don’t know how they happened to go to him and ask him to be Goldwater’s television advisor, but he traveled with Goldwater all the time. So, as I say, we got to be pretty good friends.

**Riley:** Did you know much about Reagan’s relationship with his brother?

**Nofziger:** It was a good relationship. I had talked to Neil—everybody called him Moon—I had talked to him on the campaign about Reagan because I’d been hearing that Reagan was interested. At the time, Neil said, “Well, we’re going to run him against Tom Kuchel, no matter what Kuchel runs for.” Tom was the Republican Senator from California, one of the Republican Senators, but he was a moderate to liberal Republican. And the conservatives in California—who were just beginning to be a dominant force there—were determined to beat him. They were planning to run Reagan against Kuchel if Kuchel ran for Governor, or to run for Senate in case Kuchel ran for Senate.

Of course, Kuchel did not run for Governor, but, you know, plans change. The conservative fat cats—Holmes Tuttle, Henry Salvatori, Cy Rubel, were the three, really, and one guy up north, Jack [Jaquelin Hume]—they were wealthy money people. They were conservative, and they wanted Reagan to run for Governor. They had gone to Reagan and asked him to run, and, of course, he said, “Well, I’m really not interested in running.”

They finally persuaded him. He agreed to go up and down the state for six months talking to people to see if there was any interest in him. That was what he did, and there was, and so he ran. But, the interesting thing is, when Dick Nixon ran for Governor of California—that would have been 1962—Reagan had been asked to run by a group of conservatives at the time. This was before Nixon got into the race, but there was a congressman back here named H. Allen Smith, who was one of a small group of people who went to Reagan—I guess in very early ’62—and asked him to consider running for Governor.

He said no, he didn’t want to. It was a smart thing in retrospect, because he would not have beaten Nixon in the primary. Of course, Nixon went on and ran for Governor—the only candidate for Governor with a foreign policy—and lost. He really wasn’t interested in being Governor of California, and everybody sensed that he was looking at Governor merely as a stepping-stone to getting back to running for President.

But anyway, as I say, Reagan lucked out because he did not run for Governor in ’62, and, by this time, Pat Brown in ’66 was a two-term Governor and had kind of worn out his welcome.
Knott: So during the ’66 campaign, you served as press secretary.

Nofziger: Yes, they asked me to do it. I had interviewed Reagan that summer—I’ll never forget the date, because it was the day the Watts riots broke out. I had to go out to California anyway, and I spoke to Neil and said, “I think your brother’s going to run for Governor, and I’d like to have lunch with him.”

The three of us had lunch at the old Brown Derby at the corner of Hollywood and Vine. Reagan was always very coy about saying he was going to run for anything. He always waited until the last minute, and I couldn’t get him to say that he was doing anything more than just thinking about it. So I went back and wrote a story saying he was going to run for Governor. Fortunately I was right, because he didn’t tell me he was going to. It was after that that they came to me and asked me to be a press secretary, and I finally agreed to it.

So I really joined the campaign—I think it was probably in late February. I joined it in San Diego, where Reagan was because the state Republican convention was down there. Reagan came down with a bad case of the flu and couldn’t address the convention. But that was the place that they came up with what we call Reagan’s Eleventh Commandment: “Thou shalt not speak ill of another Republican.” Of course, it wasn’t Reagan’s idea at all: It was dreamed up by a guy named Bob Walker, who was the executive director of the state committee. A man named Dr. Gaylord Parkinson was the chairman.

Of course, the chairman is supposed to be neutral, but they came up with this thing mainly to keep the other candidates from attacking Reagan for being ignorant and for not having any political experience and that sort of thing. It worked very well because we’d say, “You can’t pick on Reagan because he’s a fellow Republican.” So whenever the major candidate—George Christopher, the former mayor of San Francisco—would say something negative about Reagan, we’d holler, “Eleventh Commandment,” and everybody would say, “Oh, George Christopher shouldn’t have said that.”

I joined the campaign at the end of February. I’d been out once before at the Reagans’ house to meet with the Reagans, and there was a meeting with probably Holmes Tuttle, and Tom Reed, and Bob Mardian and one or two others. Anyway, I must tell you, I was not a very good press secretary. I was totally ignorant about what a press secretary ought to do. So I did my own thing. My assumption was that the press secretary ought to travel with the candidate because that’s where the press is going to be. They’re going to be with the candidate. A lot of press secretaries like to stay in the office. I think that’s a mistake. I think you ought to be with your candidate.

Because I felt that way, and because apparently Stu Spencer and Bill Roberts—who were running the campaign—didn’t have any idea what a press secretary should do either, they let me do my own thing. So it wound up that I spent the entire campaign traveling with Reagan, which meant, of course, I got to know him pretty well. We would sit in the back seat of the car—Reagan didn’t like to fly. He had flown some before the war, but he had not flown after the war because he believed flying was dangerous. So he would take a train everywhere, or drive.
But they convinced him that he had to fly if he was going to run for Governor of California. California was just too darn big to drive, and trains were not running all that frequently and didn’t go to the places we wanted to go. So we did some flying. Later on we did a considerable amount of flying in an old DC-3 that a guy had loaned us—a turkey rancher—and he had hauled turkeys around in this thing. Anyway, we put seats back in it, and we used it for a campaign plane.

*Riley:* Did it smell of turkeys?

*Nofziger:* No. I guess he got it pretty well cleaned out. It was a big old lumbering DC-3 that didn’t go very fast, but they were pretty safe airplanes. Anyway, we did an awful lot of driving around the state. Reagan and I would sit in the back seat, me with my portable typewriter on my lap, and we’d figure out what we wanted to say for a speech insert, and I would write it.

Reagan had always written his own speeches, but he got comfortable with me because I would write these inserts. When he became Governor and obviously was too busy to write all of his own speeches, it just fell to me to write them. So for the time I was in the Governor’s office, I wrote most of his speeches.

*Riley:* You say inserts. The inference is that he had a standard stump speech—

*Nofziger:* We had a stump speech, sure. But you’ve got to have an insert, mainly so you can give the press something new to write, because otherwise they’re not going to write anything. We’d figure out what we wanted to say. I remember I suggested that we propose a two-term limit—at that time there was no term limit on Governors—because Pat Brown was running for his third term.

So we proposed it, and it flew a little bit. When Reagan got to be Governor, we introduced the legislation, but he didn’t really care about it, and nobody else really cared about it, and it never went anywhere. But now, of course, they do have a two-term limitation. We were just a little bit ahead of our time.

*Riley:* I want to interrupt and ask—

*Nofziger:* Interrupt any time. I’m just rambling here because you’re not asking me specific questions.

*Riley:* This is the purpose, just to get as many recollections as we can on the record. When we talk with somebody like Stu Spencer—who we spent some time with—and in reading about others who encountered Reagan during this period, there very often is a kind of conversion that goes on, because this was a man who had been an actor, and who didn’t have a reputation as being somebody who would be successful in politics. Did you have that kind of conversion? Were you skeptical that this was a man who could develop a political career?

*Nofziger:* Well, obviously, here’s a guy who has no political experience. But I didn’t go in with a negative feeling, because I’d interviewed him, and he was a very personable person. I’d heard
“the speech” that he gave. Frankly, I was not awfully impressed with “the speech,” the one that he gave during the Goldwater campaign.

Riley: You were not impressed?

Nofziger: No, that’s right, not particularly. I don’t know why. It impressed everybody else in the world except me. It doesn’t make any difference whether I was impressed or not. But I was impressed by the fact that he had some good people around him. He had Spencer Roberts, who I knew of. He had Holmes Tuttle and those guys who had a lot of money and were not going to throw it away.

I started going out with him, and as I say, of course, when I first got out there, he had the flu. But as we started moving around the state, I was impressed with him. There was something about him that appealed to the people he talked to. I’ve never been able to put a finger on it. It’s probably that word *charisma*, which is a word that I absolutely hate. Nevertheless, I came back—I’d been out with Reagan two or three times—and I was talking to Bill Roberts. I said, “You know, there’s something out there, Bill. I can’t put a finger on it, but there’s something between him and the people, and I think he can be elected Governor.” I went on and said, “You know, I think he could even be President some day.” The only reason I remember this is because Bill Roberts looked at me—and he had big bulgy eyes—and he said, “Oh, Lyn, what will that poor soul do if he ever gets to be Governor?”

That was the feeling—that this guy didn’t know very much. It irritated Reagan. He had the feeling that the people on the campaign really didn’t have a hell of a lot of confidence in him. It’s interesting to me now because I read things that people say now that I know wasn’t the fact back then.

Riley: Sure.

Nofziger: But he determined that he was going to go out and take questions from the audience. They didn’t want him to do this. They were scared to death that he would really foul up, not so much because he was dumb, but that he was ignorant. He didn’t really know a heck of a lot about state government and so forth. But he went out, and he started taking questions, and he did very, very well. Obviously, none of us can answer every question, but he did very well.

Although I remember one time, we were up in Clear Lake, which is up in northern California. There’s a river called the Eel River that goes into Clear Lake. We were talking to a group of—oh, I suppose just townspeople and farmers up there—it was an outside event. And somebody said to him, “Governor, what are you going to do about the Eel River?” And he said, “Where’s the Eel River?” And the guy said, “You’re standing on it”—which is kind of embarrassing. Now this wasn’t Reagan’s fault. We had not briefed him properly. I mean, you can’t ask him to know everything.

To digress, when I was covering the [John F.] Kennedy campaign—Jack Kennedy running for President—he was up in Idaho, and they had decided they would start having Kennedy take questions from the audience. One of the first questions up there in Idaho was “What are you
going to do about the Burn’s Creek project?” He said, “What’s the Burn’s Creek project?” And the guy said, “Well, you voted for it twice.” After that, they planted their questions. So these things can happen to you. But anyway, Reagan was very comfortable taking questions.

**Riley:** Did you plant questions?

**Nofziger:** No, never did, never thought to. I would have if I’d given it consideration, and if I’d had the staff. But, as I say, ordinarily—especially during the primary—there would be a driver, who was also his security guy, and a guy from the phone company, and Ronald Reagan, and me. That was it. So you really couldn’t do the things that you might have done if you’d known to do them because you didn’t really have the resources.

Anyway, he took the questions and did very well. What else can I say?

**Knott:** Did he enjoy campaigning, or did he find it a burden?

**Nofziger:** I think he enjoyed campaigning. Now, there was one thing. I told you he got the flu. We’d been out campaigning for a month or so after that, and he had a relapse. We’d come back to Detroit. Tom Reed had set up a speech in Detroit with the Detroit Economic Club, because we were trying to prove that Reagan was smart and knew things and all this stuff. Reagan got quite ill back there. We called a doctor in and gave him some medicine, and he made his speech, and we took him home and put him in bed. He was in bed for several days.

Then we got him up and started campaigning him again, and he didn’t have any endurance. The press thought he was either lazy or he didn’t have any endurance. It wasn’t until we got him into the ’76 campaign and he ran their fannies off that they finally figured that this guy was not weak. He just never really recovered from that bout of flu. I’m trying to put this delicately. It had gone down into his testicles, and they had swelled up.

In August of 1967, when he was Governor—he had been Governor for six months—he had another recurrence of it. They put him in the hospital, and they did what could be called some sort of a prostate operation, although it wasn’t really one. What had happened was he had little seeds, tiny seed stones, not in his gallbladder, but in his bladder, and they were blocking the access from the bladder on out. His prostate had swollen, and they went in and they went up the front, and they kind of reamed him out a little bit. He was in the hospital for a week.

You know, you have three or four times over a career that you’re proud of something, and this is really one of my proudest moments. I went to the doctor, and I said, “Now, I need an explanation of this, and I don’t want you ever to use the word prostate. People think that prostate problems are the problems of an old man, and I don’t want people to think that this is an old man.” So I spent a week talking to the press and telling them what had happened—accurately, but never using that word. And as a result they were writing that he had gallbladder trouble, this, that, all kinds of nonsense. It was not until the very last day that some guy in the little old Ventura Star Press up in Ventura called me. I’m giving him all this line I developed, and he says, “Well, sounds to me like he has prostate trouble.” I said, “Oops.” He never wrote it, or if he did, it never got out.
But anyway, that’s why they didn’t think that he had much endurance. After they cleared that up, he was fine. And of course, the other incident out of that campaign—once again, in the primary—was when he had been invited to speak to an assemblage of Negro Republicans. We called them Negroes in those days.

He was on the stage with George Christopher and with the third candidate, a man named William Penn Patrick, who later was killed in an airplane crash. Bill Patrick was selling avocado extracts and things for lotions, and he had one of these pyramid schemes. He was running for Governor, and both he and Christopher took to needling Reagan a little bit, indirectly accusing him of being anti-civil rights because he, like a lot of people, had opposed the civil rights bill.

Reagan lost his temper eventually. He had a piece of paper in his hand, and he wadded it up and flipped it in the audience and stomped off the stage. Fortunately, I was there, and I went and caught him going down the aisle. He’s cussing under his breath, and I’m saying [whispers] “Shut up—” We get outside, and by this time he’s calmed down. He says, “Well, what do we do now?” I said, “I think you better go home, and I’ll stay here and figure out what we do.” So he left. And right after he left, a very good guy named Jim Fluornoy came out and said, “Where’s Reagan?” I said, “I sent him home.”

He said, “He probably ought to come back. We’re going to have a reception tonight, a cocktail party, and he probably ought to come back to that.” I said, “Obviously you’re right. I’ll go get him.” So I drove up to Reagan’s house, and he and Nancy were there. They were talking about it, obviously upset and not knowing what to do.

I said, “You’ve got to go back to the reception.” He did. He understood right away. There was no argument. So he went back to the reception, and he was the only one of the three candidates who bothered to attend the reception, which was very fortunate. He explained to people that he wasn’t mad at them, and it went very well.

Except the L. A. Times the next morning had a very nasty story about it. Paul Conrad, their cartoonist, had this wonderful cartoon. Reagan had put out his autobiography called Where’s the Rest of Me? from the line in King’s Row when he lost his legs. Well, Conrad had him, no head, holding his head under his arm saying, “Where’s the rest of me?”

I get up to Reagan’s house that morning, and they’re furious. They want to kill Paul Conrad. Ronald Reagan is going to go down and see [Dorothy] Buffy Chandler, who ran the paper at the time, owned it. I’m saying, “Ron, you can’t do that. What you’ve got to do is call Paul Conrad and ask him for the original of this thing. Tell him you think it’s funny.” He wouldn’t do that. They compromised. He didn’t go down and see Buffy Chandler. But he wouldn’t call Paul Conrad, which is too bad. I’d love to have that thing. It was a great cartoon. You know, if you’re not Ronald Reagan, it’s funnier than heck. Eventually he got a little tougher hide.

I have to tell you something that goes with this. After he got to be Governor, the Times is running nasty editorials on him, and Conrad is digging him whenever he can, and Reagan is getting madder and madder and madder. Finally Carl Greenberg, who was their political writer,
wanted to interview Reagan. Carl was a good guy and a fair reporter, so I went to Reagan and I said, “Carl’s going to come in and interview you, and what you really need to do is just jump all over him on all these editorials and these cartoons. Let him know you’re very unhappy about it.”

So Carl came in, and Reagan spent the first ten minutes just raising hell with him, and poor Carl didn’t know what to do. It’s not his fault, you know? So he had this interview, and he went away, and he told his editors. The *L. A. Times* did two things. They took Conrad off the editorial page and put him on the op-ed page. And they ran an editorial that said, “Anything except these editorials is not ours.”

I told Conrad later, “You should have quit.” He said, “The money was too good.” I mean, instead of supporting their guy they— That lasted about six months. Conrad stayed on the op-ed page, but then they went back to running editorials and things against Reagan. But it was one of those delightful little episodes.

**Knott:** He was thin-skinned?

**Nofziger:** Yes. But you know, he wasn’t a politician. You get over being thin-skinned. Those things always bother you a little bit, and they used to bother him even when he was in the White House. He learned not to show it. But I’ll pick up a story about me, and I say, “Those miserable S.O.B.s,” and I guess that makes me thin-skinned. But now I smile when I see them.

**Riley:** We get the impression that Mrs. Reagan may not have developed quite as thick a skin when it came to attacks on her husband. Is that true?

**Nofziger:** When Nancy married Ronald Reagan, he became her career. She devoted her life to Ronald Reagan, and I think that’s a good thing. I don’t think he would have been Governor or President without her. She’s a smart lady. She’s got pretty good political instincts. She’s very defensive of her husband. The one place you can run afoul of her is when she thinks you’ve said or done something that’s not in his best interest. I know. I’ve been there. She’s a little thin-skinned about that, but that’s all right. She never went out and made a fool of herself in that regard.

**Knott:** How much of a presence was she in the ’66 gubernatorial campaign?

**Nofziger:** Not very much. She was there. She did some campaigning, but it was really not her thing. Surprisingly, for an actress, she’s kind of shy. She was not an accomplished public speaker. But she came across very well because she was petite and demure, and, of course, a nice looking woman.

**Riley:** Did she travel with him much in that campaign?

**Nofziger:** No, she traveled with him very little in that campaign. She pretty much stayed home. As I look back, I can’t remember any particular time going up and down the state when she was with us. I think she would probably appear with him in some places. You know, for years, while their children were not grown, they wouldn’t fly together. They didn’t want to risk both of them...
being killed and leaving the kids as orphans. I said, “You really ought to take the kids with you on the basis that the family that flies together dies together.” They didn’t think that was funny.

She’s a sensitive woman. There’s no question about that. She’s sensitive. But I’ll tell you, when he was shot, she handled herself just beautifully, just remarkably well, no tears. She was there comforting Jim Brady’s wife and just handling herself very well.

Knott: So after Ronald Reagan wins the ’66 election, you become his director of communications.

Nofziger: Yes, I went up there as press secretary, and a fellow named Phil Battaglia, who had been our state campaign chairman and then became his executive secretary (chief of staff), decided they should call me communications director. I think I’m the first communications director. Didn’t mean anything. We then took the guy I brought in to be my assistant. We made him the press secretary, but it really didn’t change a lot. I still traveled with the Governor. As I say, I was the guy who was writing most of his speeches. You know, when the press wanted something, they came to me. So it was a change in title, but not really a change in function.

Knott: Within two years there’s a great Reagan for President movement—

Nofziger: Yes, there are people like me who are hawks on this kind of stuff, and there are people who are doves on it. There was a split in the Reagan team. I don’t mean that badly, but there are people who felt, You’ve been elected to be Governor, stay here and be Governor. And there were people like me who thought, Well, this guy has got something, but if he’s Governor for six years or whatever, who knows what will happen? It seems to me that he’s on a roll here right now. He’s won this governorship handily. He’s the Governor of the biggest state. He’s well known across the country. Let’s go ahead and push him because we have a shot because Lyndon Johnson’s got problems.

Riley: It strikes me that recent history proves you exactly right. Recent California Governors have started out having nationwide reputations, only to see those reputations dwindle the longer they stay in office.

Nofziger: As a matter of fact, very shortly after Reagan was elected Governor and before he was nominated, we had a little meeting up at the Reagans’ house. I can’t tell you in retrospect who everybody was who was there, but I’m sure Holmes Tuttle was there, and probably Ed Mills. Tom Reed was there, and I was there, and the Reagans were there. We talked then about the Presidency, and it was agreed at the time that Tom Reed would go out and talk to F. Clifton White. Do you know the name?

Riley: Um-hum.

Nofziger: And see if we could get him involved in just exploring the possibilities. So literally, from the very beginning, Tom Reed and I were interested in Reagan running for President in ‘68. Now, I would like to suggest that anything I say about this, you check with Tom Reed, because
Tom Reed takes detailed notes, and I never took any notes. So if there’s a difference between what Tom says and I say on times and people and so forth, Tom would be correct.

Anyway, we did go ahead and got a working agreement with Clif White. We pushed that, but Reagan was not interested, really, in being President. He had a feeling that he wasn’t ready, and after the ’68 convention he told me, and he told other people, “I’m not going to feel bad about this. I just was not ready for it.” And he gave us damn little help, I must say. What we did, we did pretty much on our own. We did go around the country.

There was one little interesting episode. We stopped in South Carolina for some reason or other and met with Strom Thurmond. Strom took Reagan into the back room in his hotel suite and talked to him about it, and told him, “Young man,”—I guess all things are relative—“you’ll be President some day, but not this year.” Strom didn’t know how right he was.

You know, Nixon was pretty much a foregone conclusion. You had Thurmond and the south all for Nixon. You had Barry Goldwater for Nixon. We had dissident conservatives who were for Reagan. And, of course, you had [Nelson] Rockefeller in this thing. Rockefeller was trying to be President at this time. Of course, Rockefeller had screwed up so badly. Everybody thought he was going to run for President initially in 1967. Spiro Agnew, who had just been elected Governor of Maryland, was close to Rockefeller, and he came out and talked to Reagan about being Rockefeller’s running mate. He said something very interesting to Reagan. He said, “I want a Rockefeller-Reagan ticket either way,” either Rockefeller-Reagan or Reagan-Rockefeller.

Then Rockefeller said that he was going to have this big announcement, so some of us gathered in Reagan’s office to listen to this big announcement. Spiro Agnew had a lot of people in his place listening to this big announcement that Rockefeller was going to run for President, and Rockefeller announced that he wasn’t going to run. Of course, it just destroyed poor old Agnew. Anyway, we sat there and said, “Gee, this is funny, what goes on?” Then, of course, he changed his mind again and decided to get in it. But by that time it was too late.

When we got to the convention, we knew we didn’t have anywhere near enough votes, and we knew Rockefeller didn’t. But we thought that if between the two of us we could keep Nixon from winning on the first ballot, then the conservatives in the party who were supporting Nixon would begin to slide away.

Well, the Rockefeller people thought that they didn’t need to join with us in the effort. They didn’t do a very good job of counting votes, and Nixon won it on the first ballot. Reagan had gone there as a favorite son candidate, and Bill Knowland, who was the Senator from California—I’m trying to remember if Bill was still a Senator. I think he may have left the Senate, because he’d run for Governor; that’s right. Anyway, he came to me and said, “Why don’t we get Reagan to announce that he’s really a candidate? This will get some of the delegates to support him on the grounds that he’s a genuine candidate instead of just favorite son.”

So we went in and talked to Reagan, and Reagan agreed to do it—which was a dumb thing on my part, but not the only dumb thing. Anyway, Reagan did it. It just irked to no end some of his people, such as Holmes Tuttle, who were supporting Reagan as a favorite son, but who were
really for Nixon and didn’t want Reagan to do this. They were very upset. But anyway, Reagan did it, and it didn’t do any good.

Riley: How did that affect his relationship with Nixon?

Nofziger: It didn’t hurt him, because Reagan was a party loyalist and as soon as Nixon was nominated, Reagan went out on the stage and announced that he was supporting him. Nixon came out to California afterward, and we went down to San Diego and met with him down there, and their relationships were fine. Although, interestingly, in 1980, when Reagan was running, Nixon was not a Reagan guy initially. He wanted John Connally. He just didn’t think Reagan was quite strong enough—live and learn. Reagan’s relationships with Nixon were always good.

I came back and worked in the Nixon White House, and then I went over to the National Committee and—

Riley: You worked in the Nixon White House? Why did you decide to do that?

Nofziger: They asked me to do that. I had left. I was not in the Reagan Governor’s office anymore. So anyway, I’m wandering all over the lot.

Knott: You did play a role in the Governor’s office, correct?

Nofziger: Yes.

Knott: How long were you in that position?

Nofziger: I was in there from, well, January of ’67 until October of ’68, so that was eighteen months, I guess.

Knott: Then you go off to the Nixon—

Nofziger: What happened there is I don’t like government. You understand I have no desire to be in government. It can be exciting if you get in at the beginning, which I have been fortunate to do, but after a while it becomes kind of routine, and there are better things to do. So, about this time, we’re trying not so much to elect Max Rafferty, who was running for the Senate, who had beaten Tom Kuchel in the primary, but his campaign was running very badly, and he was dragging down a lot of our legislative candidates.

I told Reagan I wanted to quit. I went and took over the Rafferty campaign for the last month. We didn’t win it, but we closed it from about fifteen points behind to just four or five points behind, and we saved our state legislature which, of course, we’d been trying to do. Then I just set up my own political PR shop. That spring, 1969, the Republican Governors were meeting down in Kentucky. Louis Nunn was the Republican Governor there, and they set it so that the Governors could go to the Kentucky Derby.
I had gone down there to handle the press for the Republican Governors at this thing, and Nixon came. It’s the only time a sitting President has ever been to the Kentucky Derby. He brought a lot of his staff, including a guy named Bryce Harlow, who was very close to him. Do you know the name?

**Knott:** Yes.

**Nofziger:** Bryce was at the time his assistant for congressional relations. Bryce came over to me and said, “What are you doing?” I said, “Just trying to make a living.” He said, “The President has a job that he wants done, and he asked me to find somebody to do it. I don’t think it’s a doable job, but let me tell you what it is, and let me know if you’re interested.” He did, and I did, and I wound up—this was in May—and I wound up in July back in the Nixon White House.

**Riley:** What was the job?

**Nofziger:** Theoretically, I was part of the congressional relations staff. I was Deputy Assistant to the President. The congressional relations staff was in the East Wing of the White House, and my office was in the Old Executive Office Building. My job was to run a propaganda campaign in defense of the President, to defend him when he was being attacked, to get people to cheer him when he was doing good things, and in general to put a positive face on Nixon. My assignment was to get members of Congress to support him because members of Congress are not very good at this kind of thing. So I was working with the Republicans in the Senate and Republicans in the House to do this sort of thing. It was an interesting job for a while, but like everything else, I got bored, so I went on to the National Committee, and from there I went to the Campaign to Re-elect the President. That happened because they were trying to figure out what to do about California, who should run California. The Reagan people wanted me to come out and run California, and the Nixon people were not sure. John Mitchell really wanted me to stay at the National Committee because there were problems there, and he thought I could be helpful. Finally I’m meeting with him one day and he says, “Why don’t you do both? Stay at the National Committee, and go out and run California too.” So I spent about a month going back and forth, three days in California, three days in Washington, one day on a damned airplane. I finally went to Mitchell and said, “This just isn’t going to work. I go out to California, and everything I try to do is undone by the time I get back there. So why don’t you let me go to California?”

The reason was simple. I was the only guy both the Nixon and the Reagan people trusted.

**Knott:** Maybe we should make a transition here and start approaching the 1976 election, in which you were very much in the thick of things.

**Nofziger:** Well, in the ’76 election, I read some of this wonderful stuff you put together, and I don’t remember some of it. There were those of us who all along had wanted Reagan to be President. Of course, we had figured that Nixon would serve out two terms, and then Reagan would run for President. Then Nixon of course screwed up, and so [Gerald] Ford became President. That became a problem, because a lot of our people who ordinarily would have been
enthused about Reagan running for President didn’t want anyone to run in the primary against a sitting Republican President. You can understand that.

But we had some things that seemed logical to us. First of all, Gerald Ford had not been elected—not only not been elected President, had not been elected Vice President. Secondly, he had said initially that he would only serve out this one term. Of course, you can certainly understand him changing his mind, but nevertheless, he said this. And thirdly, we didn’t think he was a very good President.

But Reagan wasn’t sure, and once again, his money people were not sure that he ought to run. Bob Walker—this fellow I mentioned earlier—by this time was working in the Governor’s office as kind of their political guy. And Bob did something that was not very smart. He went back and talked to some people, including Bill Buckley and some others, about Reagan running as a third party candidate. The word got back to Reagan and back to Reagan’s staff, and everybody was unhappy about that. Bob was forced to resign. It wouldn’t have worked.

And so obviously there was a series of meetings of people getting together and deciding what Reagan should do. As I said earlier, Reagan was always very coy and very careful. He was never a guy to get out in front of this kind of thing. By now, this is ’75, and Reagan had left office at the start of ’75. There was a meeting in Sacramento, a couple of meetings, in which John Sears came out. And it was decided—pretty much Mike Deaver pushing Sears with Reagan—that Sears would head up—not a campaign, but an exploratory campaign. So three of us wound up back here in Washington: John Sears—we were actually working out of his office for a while; Jim Lake, who had been the Governor’s man in Washington; and me.

Riley: Had you known John Sears before then?

Nofziger: Yes, but very casually, just to say hello to. We began actually raising the money—which isn’t very easy, not when you’re going against a sitting President in your own party—and putting together staff and so forth, and talking with Reagan. Reagan is still not sure he wants to run, and one of the unfortunate things here is that because he delayed so long—he made us wait until November. I think it was November 17th. I think the initial date somebody suggested was November 22nd, and I said, “Fellas, you can’t do that. November 22nd, bad day.” So as I recall, they moved it to the 17th. But anyway, he waited so long in terms of what you do today. I mean, if this had been ten years earlier, that would have been fine, and we would have been early. But these campaigns have been moved up earlier and earlier over the years.

So a lot of people who would have liked to have been with Reagan didn’t think he would run. And being activists, they wanted to get involved. So they signed on with Gerald Ford, not only in California, but across the country. A few of them came back to us, but you don’t like to look like you jumped ship. So anyway, he came back here and announced in a press conference, a short speech at a press conference at the National Press Club in November.

And then we made a trip up and down the East Coast, went to Florida, and went to New Hampshire, and one or two other places, and got the campaign going. But if he had announced on, say, Labor Day, we’d have kept some more people, there’d have been a different attitude,
and I think we might possibly have won that. There were two or three other things that we did wrong, too, but I think that Reagan delaying his announcement until that late really hurt him as far as getting the nomination.

**Riley:** You think it was the case that he just had not made up his mind at that point?

**Nofziger:** Oh, I think he had 90% made up his mind, but he’s a very careful guy. He never wanted to get into something and then find out it’s something he shouldn’t have done. He wanted to be absolutely sure. You know, that’s what he did when he ran for Governor the first time. That’s what he did in 1980 when he ran, the time that he ran and won. He still waited until November. That’s just Ronald Reagan. But it’s very difficult for people like me, who want to get in there and get going now. There’s a lot to be done.

**Knott:** The campaign got off to a very bad start, right? You were pretty much on the ropes until you got to North Carolina, I think.

**Nofziger:** Oh, you mean after the campaign got under way.

**Knott:** Yes, right.

**Nofziger:** We go up to New Hampshire, and we think we’re going to win New Hampshire. We made a mistake there. Our campaign chairman up there, Hugh Gregg, former Governor—everybody in New Hampshire is a former Governor. [laughter] Well, you know, it’s a two-year term. This is really kind of funny. Hugh was our campaign chairman, and he wanted us to leave New Hampshire two or three days before the election so that he could get his people organized and everything going in order.

So we went off and campaigned in Illinois, and Gerald Ford came up there and campaigned those last two or three days, and it made a difference. I think these voters in New Hampshire thought, *Reagan doesn’t care enough to hang around here, and here’s Gerald Ford up here. He cared enough to come.* So as a result we lost that thing, as I recall, by 1,300-1,400 votes. We should have won. And we were so certain we were going to win—we were ahead until very late—that it had a tremendous psychological effect on us.

As we went out of there, Sears is saying, “We’ve got to go out there as if we had really won this,” because when you come right down to it, we had lost it by coming so close, once again, to a sitting President, with all those advantages that a sitting President has. But anyway, we went out of there with our tails between our legs, and you could tell. On the airplane, there wasn’t a smile in a carload.

That was the start of a very disastrous period. We lost five primaries in a row. It reached the point where Nancy was most unhappy. People were saying, “Reagan’s got to get out of this.” I had had to come up to Washington for some reason, and I was up here a couple of days. I went back down and joined them on the campaign in North Carolina. Deaver met me as I was going into the hotel, and he said, “Lyn, Nancy’s going to ask you to ask Ron to get out of the race.” He said, “You can’t do it. You’ve got to tell her you can’t do it.”
Sure enough, I go in and Nancy grabs me. She says, “Lyn, you know you’ve got to get Ronnie out of this race. We can’t embarrass him any further.” And I’m standing there trying to figure out how to tell her, “No, we can’t do this” without her being all over me. Just then Reagan walked into the room. He thought that I was going to go along with her, and he said, “Lynwood”—which is not my name, but it’s what he calls me—he says, “I am not going to get out of this race. I am going to stay in this through Texas. I am going to stay in it all the way.” I said, “Fine, that’s what I was trying to tell Nancy.”

And she accepted that okay. People who thought that Nancy ran Reagan, no. She ran Reagan when he didn’t care. When he cared, she didn’t. I mean, I’ve been there on a number of occasions where she wanted her way, and he got his way.

Of course, what had happened was, when we’d been down in Florida, some television station had offered Reagan half an hour, and we’d sat there and filmed him, just sitting behind a desk, talking—primarily, as I recall, it was about Panama and stuff like that. Of course, in those days we were very much opposed to giving away the Panama Canal. In fact, we were always opposed to it. Anyway, they ran the speech in Florida, and it didn’t do any good. We got our tails whipped there. But the people up in North Carolina got hold of that speech, and they bicycled it all around the state. It was on local television all over the state, and it apparently had a tremendous effect. We left that state and went up to Wisconsin, one of those French-named cities up in Wisconsin—

**Knott:** La Crosse?

**Nofziger:** I think it was. He was speaking to a convention of sportsmen—Ducks Unlimited, I think it was. Everybody thought Reagan was going to lose North Carolina, and the word began coming in that hey, Reagan’s ahead in North Carolina. And the press is beginning to want to talk to Reagan. And I’m saying, “You can’t talk to Reagan now.” We get back to the hotel, and the press is all gathered down in the press room. I went down there, and they said, “We’ve got to talk to Reagan.” I said, “I’ll go get him.” I went up and said, “We’re going to win this thing. You need to talk to the press.” He said, “I am not going down there until we are absolutely sure.” I said, “Okay, then we’re going to have to leave the hotel and go get on the airplane. You’ve got to commit to me that when the press shouts questions at you out there, you will not answer them. I’m going to go down and tell them you’re not going to talk to them, and if you start talking to a few of them who run out to you, we’re going to have problems.”

So I went down and told the press that we’re not going to—because Reagan has nothing to say. Of course, they were highly upset because they figured that Reagan had this one. So we went out to get in the car and, sure enough, they begin shouting questions, and he just smiled and waved at them. We got on the airplane, and the pilot announced that he had gotten word in that Reagan had won. There was something like 92% of the vote in or something, and Reagan had a five- or six-point lead.

So we get back to California, and Reagan has won this thing, and things look pretty good. But we had absolutely no money, no money. We wanted to go back to Wisconsin, I think it was—
either Wisconsin or Minnesota—because we thought if we went in there, we could win it. We didn’t have any money. We didn’t go. But it was decided that Reagan would make a nation-wide speech. So we went and borrowed $100,000 from Jimmy Lyon down in Texas to buy the time for the speech.

Come the day that Reagan is to tape the speech, and we didn’t have the money to rent the studio and get all that stuff. I called Holmes Tuttle and said, “We don’t have the money.” Holmes said, “I can’t give it to you. It’s illegal.” He had some lousy legal advice. I called Mike Curb, and I said, “Mike, I’ve got to have money for the speech.” He said, “Lyn, I will get it for you.” God bless Mike. And he calls me back in a little while and says, “I talked to Holmes Tuttle, and Holmes tells me that it’s illegal.” I said, “It isn’t. I have the lawyer’s assurance that you can lend us this money,” which I did.

I guess his money was somehow or other in a bank in Pittsburgh, and he had to get his dad to go get the bank open and get the money. I don’t know exactly the details, but he got the money. And I get a call from Holmes Tuttle, and he’s furious. He says, “You’re going to send this fine young man to jail.” I said, “Holmes, it’s legal. I assure you it’s legal.” He was getting his advice from William French Smith, who later became Attorney General. He didn’t know anything about election law. But I said, “It will be after the election anyway.”

Anyhow, we got the money and taped the speech and got it on ABC, and then, of course, we used it around the country, too. We had a beggar on the end of it, and the money just came pouring in. The problem was it was so damn late that we couldn’t use it all. Most of the primaries were gone. As a result, we had almost a million dollars left over when the campaign was over, which is terrible. That’s sinful. You should not have a penny left over at the end of a campaign. But anyway, we did, because there was no place to spend it. Of course, we went ahead and won a number of primaries.

We had one problem, one double-cross in Michigan. There was a guy in Michigan who owned a string of papers, and Reagan’s up there campaigning, and he called me. I was in California. He said, “I want to endorse Reagan with my papers, but I can’t endorse him unless we can talk to him.” I said, “That makes sense.”

So I called Mike Deaver, who was with the candidate, and said, this guy, whatever his name was, wants to endorse Reagan. But he has 14 or 15 editors, and they’re saying, “Why can’t we talk to him?” So Deaver got Reagan to change his schedule, and he sat down and talked with the editors of these papers. And the son of a bitch went ahead and endorsed Ford. And, of course, we lost Michigan. It was Ford’s home state.

**Knott:** Sears had frontloaded things, thinking he could knock Ford out early?

**Nofziger:** Yes, yes. And of course, the funny thing is, Sears also got to thinking we couldn’t win this, and he sneaked off and met with Howard Baker, thinking that maybe he could do something with him. Of course, had we won New Hampshire, I think there’s no doubt that things would have been different.
Riley: You’re playing chess with somebody on the other side who knows you really well, Stu Spencer.

Nofziger: Yes, that’s right.

Riley: So how was it working against Stu Spencer who knew the Reagans so well?

Nofziger: Say that again?

Riley: My sense is that Spencer was not held in very high regard—

Nofziger: Oh no, oh no, we hated him. Of course, he sent Bill Roberts down to Florida, and Bill cut us into little tiny pieces. By this time I was running California, and the Ford people cut a spot that said, “Governor Reagan couldn’t start a war, but President Reagan could.”

And they made a mistake. They were so proud of their spot they called a press conference, and they showed the spot to the press. I had a couple of people in there. They came back and told me about it, and I said, “Oops.” It was supposed to go on that night. We didn’t have time enough to cut a television spot, but we got our people—Phil Crane was in California, who was one of ours, and some others. We got them on radio denouncing this thing, and we cut a radio spot that said, “We urge you to look at the Ford spot because it will tell you more about Gerald Ford than it does about Ronald Reagan.”

We even had one television station call, and they said, “Are you cutting a television spot?” I said, “No, we don’t have time.” They said, “Well, can you fake one? We’ll come out and film you.” So they came out and filmed us faking filming our television spot.

Of course, we won California, but we also lost enough other primaries so that we knew by the time we got to the convention that we couldn’t carry the convention. But give Sears credit. He kept trying. He thought maybe he could swing a few delegates here and a few delegates there. That’s why we went and picked Dick Schweiker. I give Sears credit for this, and I’m not a fan of John’s. It was a desperate move. But I thought then, and I still think, it was the right thing to do.

He goes and gets Schweiker, and Schweiker agrees to it and goes out and meets with Reagan. Dick was a kind of a liberal Republican, but not quite as bad as our people thought he was. We lost some of our people on that one. We lost Jim Edwards down in South Carolina. We lost some of the people down in Mississippi. But Dick Schweiker turned out to be a very loyal Reaganite, all through, not only in ’76 but in ’80 and so forth. What Sears thought was that if he picked Schweiker, we could peel off the Pennsylvania delegation, and that would help us get some of these other delegations.

Well, John was playing it very close to the vest, and he didn’t want Dick to talk to anybody about this. But there was one guy Dick should have talked to and he didn’t, and that was Drew Lewis, who was the chairman up there for Ford. But we’d heard that Drew was unhappy, and Dick and Drew were very close friends. They’re both Schwenkfelders. You know what a
Schwenkfelder is? A Schwenkfelder is a little religious sect, kind of like Quakers. We’re the only administration in history that ever had two Schwenkfelders in our Cabinet.

Anyway, Drew got furious because he had not been told. Dick should have said, “Look, I’ve got to tell Drew. He’s my friend, I can trust him. He’s got to know. We can’t catch him by surprise.” But he didn’t, and Drew got mad. And he obviously determined that he wasn’t going to give us— And any time Dick would go up and peel off a delegate, Drew would go get him back.

**Riley:** Was Reagan himself a kind of passive actor in this whole business with Schweiker?

**Nofziger:** Oh yes, very much so. Ronald Reagan, to my way of thinking, was about as near perfect a candidate as you can get, because he let people handle the mechanics of the campaign. He didn’t interfere. He let people do what they did best. Now, of course, John went out and talked to him about this, and Reagan said okay. But Reagan didn’t initiate it. Reagan’s busy being the candidate, which is what candidates ought to be.

Then we sent Schweiker out to talk to him, and if that hadn’t worked well, we would have ended it. Reagan always had the final word on these things, but he assumed that the political people knew what they were doing.

**Riley:** So he was not somebody who was a political thinker himself in strategic terms of a candidate?

**Nofziger:** He was not a campaign thinker, no, never was. Never saw that as his job. It’s always amused me, people come up to me and say, “I’m going to run for dog catcher, and I want to talk to Ronald Reagan and see how you run for office.” That’s like asking me how you operate on somebody’s appendix.

[BREAK]

**Riley:** I had raised a question with you about Reagan as a political strategist, and your answer was he was not.

**Nofziger:** No, he’s not at all. He’s a tremendous candidate, but I would never hire him to run a campaign. That’s because he has no interest in it. I suspect that if he decided that that’s what he wanted to do, he’d be very good at it. What he did when he was Governor and President, he always figured, *We will hire people who know how to do things, and I will do the things that I do best.*

**Knott:** Can you recall an instance where he may have overruled his political people?

**Nofziger:** I’m not sure that I can recall a specific instance. But he always said, “Look, fellas, I know what’s good for me.” And he didn’t hesitate. If we wanted him to do something that he didn’t think was right for him, he wouldn’t do it. If he looked at a spot and he didn’t think it was proper, he would say, “You can’t use this.” He didn’t hesitate. But he didn’t do it very much because he assumed that the people who worked for him knew what they were doing.
One thing he did—and Nancy insisted on, too—he did his best to get his rest, because he always said, “I need eight hours sleep, and I work better with nine.” Obviously there were days that we couldn’t do that for him, and you could always tell. When he’s tired, he does not do a good job. And tired candidates make mistakes, too, and he understood that.

**Riley:** I would assume, then, that his working relationship with the other professionals was very much the same way. You said, for example, that if you were doing spots, or you were trying to work with a newspaper on something, that he would depend on your expertise rather than imposing his sense about—

**Nofziger:** Oh, yes.

**Riley:** I guess this would have been true also with his legislative affairs staff up in California and then in Washington, to the extent that you knew about it?

**Nofziger:** Oh, sure. Now, if he heard something that he didn’t like, or that piqued his curiosity, he’d talk about it. But he wasn’t a guy to dominate a meeting, for instance. I think he always felt that he was there to learn, not to tell everybody how smart he was. But, once again, he didn’t hesitate to say no. I never had the feeling that any of us were dominating him. I know there were people who tried to dominate him, and I think probably in retrospect he would not have let Sears take over as much as he did. But once again, he had been assured that Sears knew what he was doing.

**Knott:** Was Sears one of those people who looked down on Reagan, in a sense?

**Nofziger:** Yes. Sears thought that he was the smart guy and Reagan was the dumb guy. We’ve had two or three—I can think of three of them, John one—who always thought that they were the bright guy and should be the Governor or the President, and that Reagan should be the front guy, and so forth.

**Riley:** Can you tell us who some of the other people were?

**Nofziger:** Yes. Phil Battaglia, who was his first Chief of Staff when he was Governor, and Jim Baker, who was his Chief of Staff when he was President for four years. Those of us Reaganites—who like to think of ourselves as being primarily Reagan people—have always felt that if you let Reagan be Reagan, he would make the right decisions. It was only when Reagan listened to other people instead of his own instincts—and, of course, you can tend to do that if you’re listening to people who are supposed to be experts. Those are the times he got in trouble.

**Knott:** There’s a moving passage in your book about when you finally realized that Ford had won the nomination and how that hit you emotionally.

**Nofziger:** Yes, I read Nancy’s book, which is totally wrong on that, because I wasn’t anywhere near her when that happened. I was in the trailer that we had, which was where we ran our operation from. It was clear. The votes had come in, and Ford had won. We wanted to make it
unanimous. We felt that that was the proper thing to do. And the California delegation, which was my delegation—I’d been responsible for putting a lot of it together, and I had run California and so forth—I’m a kind of, I won’t say hero, but a special person to conservatives out in California. I’m kind of the original Reaganite.

Anyway, I called down there and got the chairman, whom I talked to. His name was Bob Nesen. I said, “You’ve got to tell them to make this unanimous.” He said, “Lyn, they won’t do it.” And I said, “Tell them they’ve got to, and I’ll wait on the phone.” He came back and said, “They won’t do it.” I said, “Let me talk to Holmes Tuttle.” So I told Holmes, “You’ve got to make this unanimous. We can’t look like this is sour grapes and we’re spoilsports.” And he said, “Lyn, you better come down here. They won’t do it.”

So I went down to the delegation, and, man, they were mad at me. “What do you mean? We came here to vote for Ronald Reagan, and that’s who we’re going to vote for.” They wouldn’t do it. Finally, John Rhodes, who was the Republican leader in the House at the time and therefore kind of automatically the chairman of the convention, saw what was going on, and he just rapped his gavel and said, “It’s unanimous.” He didn’t give anybody a chance to stand up and argue the point or anything else.

Okay, this is fine. So I started to walk away, and as I did I began to cry. It wasn’t disappointment. I think it was just let down, total letdown after all we’d been through. Man, I had a hell of a time. I’d get control of myself, and somebody would run into me and say, “Hi, Lyn,” and I’d just start to cry again. I got back to the trailer, and I went into the little lavatory they had there and finally got control of myself. I went out and got myself a big slug of gin, and after that I was all right. It was ridiculous at the time, and it’s ridiculous in retrospect, but it was just one of those things over which I had no—I don’t ordinarily cry.

As I say, I think it was letdown more than anything. I’d known going in we were going to lose this thing. So it wasn’t that.

Knott: So you missed the powerful speech.

Nofziger: Yes. Of course, if you read some of the books, I didn’t. But I know I did. I had no idea that it would happen, first of all. I’ve heard several stories about how it happened. But I not only stayed in my room, I went to bed. When Ford called Reagan down, and Reagan goes down there and makes this great speech—Reagan is a great extemporaneous speaker—was—and the worst thing that happened to him in the White House was these S.O.B.s over there never understood this. They had no confidence in him, and they always gave him notes and cards, and he would always use them because he thought that was what he was supposed to do. Even when he’d be talking to a group of his supporters who would come in, he’d get out these damned cards. Yet when he didn’t have them, he was just a beautiful speaker.

Anyway, Bryce Harlow told me—and I believe Bryce—that he suggested to Gerald Ford that Gerald ask him to come down. I’ve heard other stories, and I’ve forgotten what they were. Anyway he went down. I talked to Bryce, too, about the Vice Presidency. This was kind of
interesting. Reagan had said, “I don’t want to be the Vice President. I will turn down the Vice President.” Later he said, “I don’t know what I’d have done if I’d have been asked.”

Of course, he wasn’t asked, for a couple of reasons. One was that we told the Ford people not to ask him. Two, because Bryce Harlow said Ford wasn’t going to ask him under any circumstances. He said he was mad at him. He said he didn’t think he should have run against him. He said, “Every time we’d be talking about Vice President and I’d bring up Reagan’s name, Ford would just turn away, wouldn’t even speak to it.” Of course, the other thing that happened was that Bob Dole, who was a very good friend, called me after we got to the convention and started just kidding around the way he does about the Vice Presidency.

Finally I said, “Are you serious about this?” And he said, “Yes, I’d like to be the Vice President.” I said, “What do you want me to do?” He said, “Would you ask Reagan, if Ford asks him who should be the Vice President, not to say anything bad about me?” I said, “I can do that. That’s no problem.” So I did, and asked Reagan, if he was asked, to say something good about him.

Of course, Ford did ask him after he was nominated. He invited Reagan up to his suite and ran some names by him, and Reagan did say, “Well, I think Bob Dole would be a fine candidate,” or something like that. But the funny thing was, toward the very end, just before Ford had announced whom he was going to pick, Reagan’s money people had gotten together and decided that they had to send somebody to Ford to ask Ford to ask Reagan to be his running mate. As they started to do this, the announcement came that it was Bob Dole, which was good.

Reagan said afterward, “What do you do when the President asks you?” Which tells me that he probably had had second thoughts about that. Fortunately, it never came to that. Although, Bob Dole is not a good candidate. He’s a good candidate for Senator in Kansas. He’s not a good national candidate. He was not really a good candidate for Vice President, and he was a terrible candidate for President. A Ford-Reagan ticket could very well have won that.

Knott: We’ve had some other testimony that the reaction to that speech and coming so close in ’76, that right then and there Ronald Reagan knew he was going to run again in four years. In your book, if I read it correctly, you don’t seem to agree with that.

Nofziger: No, I don’t. I’m not sure he did. I think that as he got thinking about it, he did. When we put together Citizens for the Republic, there was no talk about Reagan running for President again. We did not put together Citizens for the Republic for that purpose, and we had a million bucks which we could have started out— You know, we wouldn’t have done things a lot differently, but we would have done some differently. I thought, Okay, this is it. He was an old man for running for President. I thought he’d go up to the ranch and write his columns and give his speeches and be a kind of a grey eminence in the party. It took me a while—I don’t know how long, a matter of months, anyway—before all of a sudden it occurred to me, Ronald Reagan wants to be President again.

I think the reason for it was that he thought Gerald Ford had stolen the nomination from him. Gerald Ford had not. But I think Reagan just couldn’t conceive that Ford could have got that
from him honestly. So he determined then that he would run. Of course, we shifted the whole direction of Citizens for the Republic then to make sure we kept our organization together to build support for him as he would go into a campaign.

Riley: Could you elaborate on that a little bit more? In the way that you originally envisioned this with his being the kind of grey eminence up on the ranch?

Nofziger: Well, you know, Reagan was the chairman of the Citizens for the Republic. As I say, we had this million bucks left over, and the question was what to do with it. He could have put it in his pocket—paid income tax on it and put it in his pocket. He could have given it away. In all honesty, I think it was my idea that we turn it into a political action committee. As I tell people, I needed a job. So we turned it into a political action committee, and my thought was that we would go out and support candidates that shared Reagan’s philosophy. We’d go out and try to put on campaign schools to help elect candidates who shared his philosophy.

Riley: Was the radio a part of this originally?

Nofziger: No. The radio was entirely separate. This was Reagan’s income. The radio and the columns and the speeches were his income, and that was all handled by Deaver & Hannaford, which was entirely separate from us. So we did this. We began putting on campaign schools and seminars, and we’d get Reagan to come in and speak. He was the draw for them and so forth. We were looking for candidates whom we would help, who would carry out the things Reagan believed in. We were raising money, doing a lot of direct mail. As I say, all of a sudden it occurred to me that Ronald Reagan was going to run for President again. Of course, he wouldn’t tell you that. Will he help you? Hell no, he won’t help you. You’ve got to figure these things out for yourself.

So we changed our strategy. We began asking Reagan to go speak in support of Republicans he didn’t necessarily agree with. Anytime I could find a Republican running for office who I thought could win, we’d give him some money because I wanted him to owe us.

Riley: You were raising money to supplement that original one million?

Nofziger: Yes, sure. One of the interesting things that happened was that Chuck [Charles] Percy was running for re-election in Illinois. Chuck had been pretty critical of Reagan for running against Ford, and, of course, Chuck was not exactly the most conservative Republican out there. I had a call from the guy who was running his campaign, and he said, “Mr. Nofziger, I know you guys don’t really like Chuck Percy, I understand that. But Chuck is going to lose unless we can get some help. And I know that Governor Reagan is coming to speak in Illinois, and I was wondering if—I don’t want him to endorse him, but if he could say some good things about him.”

And I said, “Hey, we’re all Republicans. I’ll talk to the Governor and ask him not only to say good things about Chuck, but to endorse him. I think it’s important that he win.”
So Reagan goes back to Illinois and goes to make his speech, and Chuck Percy is there, and Reagan endorses Percy. Percy told him, “You know, I used to come to these things to help other candidates. Now I’m coming to them so they can help me.” Kind of poignant. Then, of course, he won. He was re-elected, and the first day he said words to the effect that “Reagan was key to my victory.” Two to three days later he said, “Oh, he didn’t have that much to do with it.” Then two years later, he gave money to John Anderson. Gratitude. [laughing]

But we did that. I found out something, too. I’m going back a minute to after Reagan left the Governor’s office, before he ran for President there in ’76. He went up and did a big fundraiser for some Congressman up there. I used to know, I’ve just forgotten his name. The Congressman came out later and endorsed Ford. I ran into him afterward, and I said, “How come you endorsed Ford when Reagan went up and did that big fundraiser for you?” And he said, “We paid him.” I said, “Huh?” He said, “Yes, we paid him to do that.” So I go to Deaver, and I say, “You can’t do that. If Reagan is going to do fundraisers for people, he’s got to do it for free. We need their help. We don’t need their money.” So after that we did not. But they were just eager to make money, and they weren’t thinking. But, you pay me, you don’t owe me, obviously.

**Knott:** I’d like to bring you back to something you said just a few minutes ago, that Reagan believed that Ford had sort of stolen the nomination. Could you elaborate a little bit?

**Nofziger:** No, because I had no idea what he based it on.

**Knott:** It wasn’t the use of patronage and White House pork—

**Nofziger:** Oh I’m sure that was probably part of it. You know, you’ve got Air Force One, which just impresses the hell out of people. You can announce we’re building a veterans’ hospital in Florida, which I think they did, or we’re building a dam here, new roads there or whatever. You’ve got the Rose Garden. You can bring all the delegates from Minnesota into the Rose Garden and talk to them. You just can’t compete with that, you know?

And Ford—who I don’t think was a very strong President—nevertheless, he was a good politician. He’d been in politics a long time. Politics was his life, whereas it wasn’t Reagan’s. Reagan’s life was trying to do something for the country or for the state. And I don’t mean this badly about Ford. Ford’s life had been politics, and he understood the uses of political force and political power.

**Knott:** I’m wondering about your own attitude toward somebody like Stuart Spencer, who had been in the Reagan camp and then goes over to Ford, then comes back. Whereas you were always very consistent. What’s your attitude toward politicos?

**Nofziger:** Stu brought me into politics. He’s the guy whom I blame for all this. Stu is a very sharp, smart pol. He has no particular philosophy. I think that probably Stu could have been a Democrat if things had worked like that, and it wouldn’t have bothered him. Stu is a hired gun. I’m not being critical of him because he’s very good at what he does. But obviously, when a guy has worked for your candidate, and then he turns around and works against him, you begin to
feel he’s a S.O.B. But when it’s over and done, it’s over and done. There are three or four people in this business I detest and loathe, but he is not one of them. I consider Stu a friend.

Knott: So we move now toward the 1980 campaign, and I think you said earlier that Reagan announced fairly late once again, November ’79.

Nofziger: Well, you know, we started once again. We started putting things together in early ’79. I think it was March we began putting things together. There were problems initially because neither Paul Laxalt nor I wanted John Sears in this thing again. We thought he’d screwed it up. We thought he’d made mistakes. We thought he was arrogant. There were a lot of reasons. Reagan had initially gone along with us, and then Deaver told him, “You can’t win this without Sears.” So Sears came in again as the person running the campaign.

It was clear from the beginning that he didn’t have much use for me, which was all right. I didn’t have much use for him either. So they stuck me over into raising money, and I’m not a fundraiser. But things went along until summertime, early August. Sears was not talking to me. Deaver came in one day, and he said, “Well, we decided to make some changes. We want you to run California and run Texas.” And I said, “Who’s going to raise the money?” He said, “I am.” I said, “Look, you need to understand a couple of things. We will win California regardless of who runs it. And there are better people to run Texas than me.”

So I figured, I’m not real dumb. I understand what’s happening here. So I just sat down and wrote a brief memo to Paul Laxalt, who was the chairman, saying I was resigning. I had better things to do, and I went on home. Bonnie Nofziger and I, as I recall, went away for two or three days and came back. Of course, the press was all over me and everything, and I didn’t say much.

The Governor called and said—well, that’s Reagan. You can hate him or love him for this, and I’m kind of on his side, but he always figured, if people want to go, let them go. I think that’s pretty good, because if you keep people around when there are problems, or when they don’t really want to stay— Anyway, he called and said, “We’ve talked about this, and we decided that you were right to go. But would you consider taking on Citizens for the Republic again?”

I said, “We’ve already got a guy running that, a fellow named Curtis Mack,” whom I had known. He’d worked for us in the ’76 campaign, and Curtis was a good man. I said, “They don’t need me.” He said, “You could take it over.” I said, “I’ve got to go make a living.” He said, “We’ll pay you.” I said no. I called him back a couple of days later and said. “Look, I will, since you don’t think you can be the chairman of it. I’ll take over the chairmanship on a non-paid basis.” So I did that.

I went to work consulting for the state committee and for the Republican minority in the state legislature and a couple of other things. Then, of course, Sears—having used Deaver to his own ends to get rid of me, and having forced out Martin Anderson—got his little clique together of himself and Charlie Black and Jim Lake, and went up to the Governor and told him that Deaver had to go, which just pleased me no end. Deaver gets there, discovers they’ve been having this little meeting and is told that these guys want him to go.
Deaver, to his credit, said, “Governor, you don’t have to make that decision. I’ll resign.” And he walked out. By this time, Reagan was having second thoughts, and he thought this was pretty awful. That, I think, was really the beginning of the end for John Sears. But John didn’t know that, and he began trying to get rid of Ed Meese, even though Meese is a bulldog, and you don’t get rid of Ed Meese.

Anyway, Deaver left, and things were going along. Then, of course, Reagan loses Iowa because Sears has decided he doesn’t need Reagan in Iowa, he—Sears—is the candidate. He will do all that needs to be done. Then they go into New Hampshire, and by this time Reagan has just had it. Sears is trying to get rid of Meese, and Reagan tells him no way. I get a call—I guess a day or two days before the primary—from Dick Wirthlin, saying, “If John Sears leaves, will you come back to the campaign?” I said, “Oh, damn. I have clients, I have candidates. I couldn’t come back to the campaign until June, until the primaries are over.” I was really upset because I thought this was my—I’d spent a lot of time wanting Reagan to be President, and I thought, This is my last chance, and I can’t do it.

Then Reagan fires Sears and Black, one of the great moments in Reagan’s life because he hates to fire people—Sears and Black and Lake. I got a call from the guy who was the head of the editorial pages of the old Los Angeles Herald Examiner, and he says, “They’ve fired these guys. Would you like to do us a piece on it?” I said, “Sure, when do you need it?” He said, “We need it this afternoon.” Just once in a while things flow. I didn’t even have to think. That typewriter typed itself. I got it down to them, and they ran a streamer across page one—I think they called it “Day of Knives” or something like that. They ran the story across the top of their op-ed page, and it was just wonderful.

I thought I was all done. But Deaver kept hanging around the Reagans and called me, I guess, one day in April. He said, “I want to have lunch with you.” I hadn’t talked to him since, I can’t think why the hell I’d want to have lunch with him anyway. I said, “What do you want?” He said, “I need to talk with you.” So I went and had lunch with him, and he said, “You’ve got to come back to the campaign.” I said, “Is this you or Reagan?” He said, “It’s Reagan.” It’s typical Reagan. I said, “I can’t come back until June, but what’s the problem?” He said, “The press operation is just not working very well.”

I went back, started traveling with them, I guess the last week in May, somewhere in there, and then ran the press operation from then on through the campaign. By this time Sears is gone, and Lake is gone, and Black is gone, and the idea that Reagan needed Sears to run—Reagan doesn’t need anybody to win an election. I mean, that’s the thing people don’t understand. I tell them my mother could have run his campaigns. Obviously you need some organization, that kind of thing. But people instinctively like and trust Ronald Reagan, and they’ll vote for him. You don’t need John Sears or Lyn Nofziger or Mike Deaver or anybody else.

Knott: He lets you go, he lets Anderson go, he lets Deaver go, and then later during the White House years there’s this perception that he doesn’t quite stick by his people. Would you comment on that? Your own feelings?
Nofziger: Well, yes and no. I think you have to remember that a President, or a candidate, has to serve himself first if he’s going to be elected, if he’s going to do what he has to do. Sometimes you stick by your people, and it’s hurtful to what you’re trying to get done.

Reagan’s not alone. People who look at it just from the outside can say with justification that Reagan didn’t always stick by his people. But I have never felt that there was anything wrong with that. What the hell does he owe me? Why should I go into Ronald Reagan and say, “You’ve got to stand by me” or “You’ve got to keep me on here”? The fact is that I know that George Shultz threatened to quit a number of times, and Reagan said no. I know that Al Haig threatened to quit a number of times, and they finally got tired of it and had a letter of resignation all prepared for him. There’s some truth to that, but I don’t think it’s a bad thing.

Knott: Later on, you get tangled with the independent counsel. Did you feel that way at that time that he was at all helpful, was supportive? Because you make a point in your book of saying that Richard Nixon gave you a contribution to your defense fund, that Nixon understood the meaning of loyalty.

Nofziger: Oh yes, but Ronald Reagan was the President, and if he’s interfering in something that was a legal matter, I think he’d have been criticized for that, and justifiably so. Now, I do know that after I was convicted—and before the conviction was overturned—some of my friends were going in and saying, “Oh, you’ve got to pardon Lyn.” And I’m telling my friends, “I don’t want you to do that. This thing is being appealed, and I’m going to fight these people as long as we’ve got a place to fight them, and I’ve got a nickel to fight them with.” So I wrote the President a letter and I said, “Dear Mr. President, I know some of my friends are asking you to give me a pardon, and I want to tell you, I don’t want a pardon. Please do not pardon me. I do not think I’m guilty. I think asking for a pardon implies that you’re guilty; otherwise, you don’t need one.”

So he called me—which was smart instead of writing me, putting anything down on paper. He called me, and he said, “Lynwood, I have your letter, and I want you to know I appreciate it, and I understand it. You’ve made it a lot easier for me.” I said, “I appreciate that, and I feel very strongly about this,” and so forth. That was it. He didn’t pardon me, and we went ahead and won the appeal.

Knott: This is a very, very minor point, but you’ve mentioned the fact that he always called you Lynwood. What was that? Did you ever attempt to straighten him out on that front?

Nofziger: No, he called me Lynwood. He did it time after time after time. My name is Franklyn, which I hate, and I’ve never gone by it. I know when someone calls me Frank, or calls me Franklin, that they don’t know me. I don’t know. I guess it was kind of a term of affection.

Riley: In a number of places in your earlier presentations at the Miller Center and elsewhere, you talk about this veil that existed with Reagan. I would like to explore that a little bit with you. What is it you mean by that?

Nofziger: There was, I always felt—less as I got used to it—but I always felt that no matter how cordial he was, and how congenial he was, and how well you got along, there was always
something there between him and you. I couldn’t put a finger on it, but you just never felt that you got really next to him. I would talk to other people who felt the same way, and Nancy never said this to me, but I’m told that Nancy said the same thing.

You get used to it, and I guess it ceases to be a factor. But there was always that little feeling that there was just something of him that is very private and he doesn’t want to—whether it was a protective mechanism because of being in the movies and being a celebrity, whether it came out of his childhood with his alcoholic father, I don’t know. Never felt it with his brother. But all I can tell you is I felt something there, and other people did, too.

Riley: It was partly a sense that there was a state of reserve, that there was part of him that you couldn’t know?

Nofziger: Yes.

Riley: This relates to Steve’s question about your personal relationship with him.

Nofziger: My personal relationship with him was very good. Obviously, there was a time when we were campaigning together in 1966 when there was a closer relationship just because of being physically closer. Then you get into an organization like a Governor’s office or a President’s office, and there are other people in there doing their thing. There are people fighting to be closest to the President and all this, and it’s really not worth fighting for. I always felt that my relationships with him were good and were friendly. Whenever I wanted to see him I could see him, which I never took advantage of. I always figured he had enough to do without bothering with me.

Riley: But the veil, you say, existed, even in 1966 when you didn’t have these institutional distances.

Nofziger: Yes, but he did have the celebrity thing.

Knott: Was he somebody who would occasionally ask about your family, how your wife was doing? Would he know your children’s names?

Nofziger: He knew Bonnie’s name. I’m not sure he knew my children’s names. There are some things that are interesting. Lots of times he wouldn’t think to do anything, and somebody would say, “Mr. President,” or whatever, “you ought to do something.” And he would say, “Oh yes.” His mind would be somewhere else. It wasn’t that he was cold-hearted or indifferent. It was just that he wasn’t thinking.

A couple of things that I remember: In the ’66 campaign, I’d left my family in Virginia to go out there, and I brought them out for the summer because they were staying with my parents. We had come from somewhere into LAX, and Bonnie and the girls—they were both teenagers at the time—had come down to the airport to meet us. We got off the plane, and they’re there, and I said to them, I guess rather brusquely, “You guys stand over there. I’ve got a press conference,
and I’ll get back to you.” So we went and had the press conference and everything. I didn’t think anything of it.

A couple of days later the senior campaign staff is in Tahoe, a house up there, and we’re having a discussion, dinner and cocktails. I’m out on the verandah having a drink, and Reagan comes out. He says, “Lynwood, I want to talk to you.” So we go in the house. I said, “What’s on your mind?” He said, “You’ve got to be nicer to your wife and children.” I said, “What the hell are you talking about?” He said, “You were pretty abrupt with them down there at the airport the other day.” I said, “Look, I have work to do, and they understood that.” He said, “Well, take it from an old married man. You’ve got to be nicer to them.” I said, “Look, I’ve been married longer than you.” He said, “Not if you count both of my wives.”

Obviously something like that stays with you. And the other thing I get kind of emotional about, after George Bush was inaugurated and Reagan went back to the Oval Office to get his last few things out of there, apparently Maureen [Reagan] was there, and she said to her dad, “Did you know that Lyn’s daughter Susie is in the hospital?” My older daughter died of lymph cancer a number of years ago.

She said, “Maybe you ought to give her a call or something.” So he did. The last call he made from the Oval Office was looking for my daughter. He couldn’t find her because he was looking for Susan Nofziger, and her married name was Piland. But he did talk to Bonnie, I guess. That’s always meant a lot to me, that he would take the time at a time like that to go look for some kid he knew very casually. Well, she wasn’t some kid, she was 38, I guess. But Bonnie, my wife, has always thought very highly of him because whenever she ran into him, he always hugged her and kissed her. The few times he met my mother, he was very cordial to my mother.

**Riley:** One might try to get to know somebody a little bit by whether they are willing to be introspective in front of you about their own life and their career, their family, and so forth—is that a part of what you found difficult with Reagan? I get the sense that he was not somebody who felt very comfortable being introspective.

**Nofziger:** Oh, he would talk a little bit about his childhood, about his dad, his dad’s drinking problem. But he was not particularly introspective, at least with me, and I don’t think he was with most other people. I think in a lot of ways he’s a very private man. I’ve always said that Ronald Reagan would make a superb hermit. He really didn’t need anybody. I suppose he’d be a little happier with Nancy, but he really didn’t need anybody. He was very happy with himself, would lie out on the deck in his swimming trunks, writing in his yellow pads, his speeches or whatnot. He was not a typical gregarious politician. He didn’t like to sit around at night with his feet up on the desk, drinking and talking politics. He never talked politics. He might talk a little bit about policy, about issues, but he never talked politics. He was, as I say, very comfortable by himself, never really appeared to need anybody.

**Riley:** That’s odd for a man in such a public career who managed to connect so well with others, don’t you think?

**Nofziger:** It is odd. He’s kind of a unique character in a lot of ways.
Riley: Has anybody, in your mind, in the subsequent writings about Reagan, gotten him right? Who has gotten closest to getting Reagan?

Nofziger: It’s kind of like portraits of Reagan. I have only ever seen one portrait of Reagan I thought was a good portrait. I had it for years, and then I gave it to the Young America Foundation to put in their headquarters out at the Reagan ranch. That was painted by a guy named ? (I’ll get it), back in 1966 it would have been. Reagan had not sat for it. Phil Battaglia and I were down at the house one day, and people had sent Reagan a lot of stuff, and he got a lot of pictures and one thing and another, and he said, “Why don’t you guys each pick out what you want?” So I picked out this one, and it was really an excellent likeness. It’s done in acrylic.

Anyway, trying to get to Reagan the person is probably a little bit like that. You get him almost right, but I’m not sure that that’s not true of almost anyone, if you get anybody altogether right.

Knott: Was he somebody who enjoyed working a room, as they say?

Nofziger: He would do it, and he wouldn’t do it reluctantly. I suppose he started doing those things because he was told he had to do it, that this is how you get the votes. I think if we had said, “Hey, Ron, we’re not really going to work the ropes anymore. You don’t need to work the room,” that would be fine. It was a political thing for him. I don’t mean he doesn’t like people. He did like people. He just didn’t need people. There’s a difference.

Knott: The image of Reagan is of a very upbeat, optimistic, cheery kind of guy.

Nofziger: It’s absolutely true.

Knott: Absolutely true. Did you ever see moments when that was not the case?

Nofziger: Oh, sure. I’ve seen him mad. I’ve seen him worried. I’m not sure whether I have ever seen him what I would call discouraged, but I’ve seen him get mad at himself and mad at other people.

Riley: Do you recall the angriest you’ve ever seen him?

Nofziger: Oh, I don’t know, maybe that time talking to the blacks when he was furious. He had an interesting— You’d go into his office, especially when he was Governor, and he’d get into an argument with somebody, legislator or one thing or another. If he threw his glasses, you knew he was pretending to be mad.

Riley: That’s the way Hollywood envisions—

Nofziger: When he came out of that meeting with [Mikhail] Gorbachev in Reykjavik, he may have been a little bit discouraged then, just figuring he wasn’t getting anywhere with that guy. But he did the right thing there, and it worked out well. But he wasn’t a guy who brooded. He wasn’t a guy who held grudges. He wasn’t a guy who sulked. He had a lot of confidence in
himself. I guess the thing that irritated him—especially when he was running for Governor the first time—was to discover that the people who were around him really didn’t have confidence in him. But he had. I don’t think he’s ever really doubted himself.

Sure, he’s made mistakes. I wasn’t there at the time, but I suspect that he had a lot of self-doubt about Iran-Contra. But ordinarily very upbeat, very positive, believing in himself, believing in the American people, had really a strong faith in God, was a pretty devout Christian.

I think it was when he was running for President in ’76, there was a radio evangelist, a pretty good guy in California, George Otis, who was conservative. I got hold of him and said, “You’ve got a great mailing list. What do I have to do to borrow it?” He said, “I’d like to interview Reagan.” I said okay.

So he came out to Reagan’s house, and they sat there, and they talked about religion. Reagan was reluctant. He had always been reluctant to talk about his religion. But he did allow as how he was a born-again Christian. Of course, he and Nancy went to church at the Presbyterian church up there, the Bel Air Presbyterian, I guess it was. But he never went to church back here, because he felt it was unfair to go disrupt the congregations here.

But he had a strong faith in God. He told Deaver after he was shot that he felt that God had saved him for a specific purpose, and that he would try to remember that. I think he thought that that purpose was to stand up to and get rid of communism, because he certainly became determined.

Riley: Did he like being in Washington?

Nofziger: Oh, hell no. He liked being on the ranch. He didn’t like being in Sacramento either. He liked being home. He was here, and he was up at Camp David, but he much preferred being in California and being on the ranch. In Sacramento, he much preferred being down in Los Angeles. Reagan never became a social friend of politicians. He had his own group of friends down in L.A., and those were the people he associated with. I don’t mean that he ignored them, but he did not have a social life in Sacramento, and he didn’t really have much of a social life here. Politics was not his thing. Government was his thing, the thing he wanted to do. But politicians were just not his kind of people.

Knott: Can we go back to the 1980 campaign? Fall, 1980, against Jimmy Carter. Could you tell us a little bit about the role you played in the general election campaign of ’80?

Nofziger: As you know, I went back to the campaign roughly the first of June. Of course, Reagan was nominated easily and overwhelmingly. He’s nominated in Detroit, and then we’re trying to figure out what we’re going to do about a Vice President. I guess there had been more work done on the Vice President than I was aware of. When we sat down to look at the Vice Presidency, Dick Wirthlin came in. He had done some polling, and he said, “My polls show that there are three people who can help you: Gerald Ford, George Bush, Howard Baker.”

Reagan didn’t like any of them. He thought George Bush was a wimp, and he was still mad at Howard Baker for opposing him on the Panama Canal. Of course, he was still mad at Gerald...
Ford because he thought Gerald Ford had chiseled him out of the Presidency four years earlier. Wirthlin said the polls showed that Ford could help us the most.

So we sat down and talked with the Ford people. I was not in those meetings. Ed Meese, a couple of others, fiddled around and fooled around. The Ford people were proposing that if Ford became the vice presidential nominee and the Vice President, he would, in effect, become the President. They would be nice and let Reagan go to the funerals, and he—Ford—would pick the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense. Anybody who wanted to see the President would have to go through him. Ed Meese came down from one of the meetings and showed it to me, and I said, “Ed, this guy wants to be President.” He said, “Yes, but he ain’t gonna be.” (He said, “He’s not going to be.” I’m the only one who says ain’t.)

They fiddled around for a couple of days, and finally we’re right down to where we’ve got to make a decision. Reagan was finally saying, “Well, I don’t think it can be Ford.” At the same time, Ford was saying, “This is a mistake.” They both separately came to the agreement—because they hadn’t been talking to each other—that this really wouldn’t work. So Ford came down, and they went in the back room—just the two of them—and talked about it and decided it wouldn’t work. I always thank God for that.

That would have been a terrible mistake, an awful mistake. It would have indicated to everybody that Reagan didn’t think he could handle the Presidency, that he had to bring this guy in. I don’t think Reagan could have been elected under those conditions.

So then we’re standing there, and Reagan says, “What do we do now?” Of course, everybody has their own story. But I remember Marty Anderson and me talking to him and saying, “Well, we think it has to be George Bush. Why? Because George Bush is taller than Howard Baker.” Not much, you could flip a coin otherwise. So Reagan agrees, anyway—however it happened—that it should be George Bush.

So a fellow named Chuck Tyson dialed the Bush headquarters, and Drew Lewis took the phone. It’s interesting, because I have read all kinds of things that say Reagan called him directly, which he didn’t, or that somebody else called him. But I knew it was Drew Lewis. So when I was writing my book, I called Drew, and I said, “Who called George Bush?” He said, “I did, and you gave me the phone number,” which I didn’t remember at all. I still don’t remember giving him the phone number.

But anyway, Drew called there and said that Reagan wanted to talk to Bush. The story I’ve gotten is the Bush people thought that well, Reagan was telling him, “Tough luck, but I’ve picked somebody else.” Of course, Reagan got on the phone with Bush and said, “I’d like you to be my Vice President.” Bush, I guess, gave the thumbs-up sign, and there were cheers and everything there.

So he picked Bush, and they run down to the convention and announce that and so forth. The next day, Reagan invited the Bushes to breakfast. The thing you have to understand about Ronald Reagan—which is one reason he’s a good politician for a non-politician—is he’s an
includer. He believes you bring people in. He doesn’t believe you should keep people out. He understands that you win elections by bringing people in.

So George and Barbara—and I guess probably Jim Baker and others—were there, and they had this breakfast, and Reagan was very good. He assured Bush that he would be part of the team and that they would run a joint campaign and so forth, and they did. It was interesting, because Reagan brings Bush in, and Bush at the same time was about as good as you could get as a Vice President. Reagan told him after they were elected, “Look, you and I are going to have lunch once a week”—which never works out, but pretty much—“and whenever I’m in a meeting, you can come to that meeting,” and therefore made him feel very much a part of it.

Bush, on the other hand, never leaked—that I could find out—never was critical. Somebody said to him one time, “Mr. Vice President, when you’re at meetings with President Reagan, you never say anything.” He said, “Look, if I say something, and it looks like I’m disagreeing with the President, people are going to go out and say that Reagan and Bush are having disagreements and all sorts of things. So anything I have to say to the President I will say in private,” which was very smart and very good and very helpful.

So we start the campaign, and I’ve forgotten where we went the first stop.

Riley: Alabama, weren’t you?

Nofziger: No, it was not Alabama. It was Mississippi. Nancy was mad as hell about that. She didn’t think we should go there, start out in the south. But we got down there, and there was a big crowd at this fairgrounds, and it went very well. It had been muddy, raining and everything, but that went very well.

Then we went up to Michigan. We had talked earlier on the airplane that Jimmy Carter was now starting his campaign someplace where the Ku Klux Klan had had its start. On the airplane, I said, “Maybe we ought to mention that.” I got shot down very firmly by everybody. So that was fine, you know, win some, lose some. I was wrong anyway.

But Reagan is speaking up there to the crowd in Michigan. I think we were at a fair or something. Anyway, we were outside. And he looked down, and he saw some guy with a Carter mask or something on his face, and he starts talking about this damn Ku Klux Klan thing, and all the stuff hit the fan. The press was just looking for him to say something. And Reagan, as soon as he said it, knew he shouldn’t have said it.

So we get him out of there, and he’s apologetic. Of course, half the staff is blaming me, and that’s all right, that’s part of the business. The press is demanding to talk to him about this, and I wouldn’t let them talk to him about it. I spent most of the time on the plane the next day deflecting the press, making them madder than hell by not giving them any answers that they wanted. Anyway, they wrote nasty stories about me, broke my heart. [chuckling]

So it didn’t get off to a really good start. You remember just bits and pieces about this. One of our black guys had come to me and said, “Well, we really ought to sit down with Jesse Jackson.”
So okay, we go and sit down with Jesse Jackson—another mistake, talk to Jesse Jackson. Then he gets up and runs out and holds his press conference while we’re still trying to fight through the crowd that I think he’s put there so we can’t get out. That wasn’t very good.

Then it’s suggested that maybe we should go to the south Bronx. So we go to the south Bronx to talk to people there, and the south Bronx in those days looked like it had gone through a bombing raid. I mean, it was just devastated. We get out there, and we’ve set up a place for Reagan to speak, and people are gathering around, they’re coming out of holes in the ground, one thing and another. They’re shouting and hollering at him, and Reagan finally got mad and said, “Damn it, if you’ll shut up and give me a chance to talk, we can do something for you.” So anyway, we got out of there alive. I’d say the Secret Service was not very happy with me on that one. I guess it wasn’t exactly the best place to go.

Actually, the campaign went pretty smoothly. The other thing, it was getting kind of late in the year. I guess it was early October, and we’d gone into Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The campaign had been going all right, but there didn’t seem to be any excitement out there. Our polls showed us two or three points ahead. I got up in the morning—and I’d been opposed to a debate all along. I just didn’t think we needed one, and I’m not a great believer in doing things that I don’t think can help you, whether it’s a debate or a press conference. The press used to get mad at me because I wouldn’t hold a press conference. I said, “Look, we hold press conferences for our benefit, not for your benefit,” which didn’t make them very happy. But that’s what you do. If you start letting the press run your campaign, you end up with problems.

Anyway, I got up and said to myself, You know, we’re going to have to debate. So I went down to Stu Spencer’s room to tell him this. He’s packing, and as I walk in he looks up and says, “You know, we’re going to have to debate.” I said, “That’s what I came down here to tell you.”

So we went out to go to the airplane, and Deaver said to me, for no particular reason, “Why don’t you ride out to the airplane with Reagan?” So I get in the limousine with Reagan, and we’re driving out to the airplane, and he says, “Lynwood, I think we’re going to have to debate.” And I said, “Damn you, I’ve talked to Stu about this, and we agreed, but we decided we would not say anything until we could talk to you on the airplane. Now they’re going to think I talked to you in advance, and I don’t need that. Please don’t say anything.” He said he wouldn’t, and he didn’t.

We get on the airplane, and then Deaver and Stu and I—and whoever else was there, one or two others—get together and say, “We think you ought to debate.” Reagan says, “Yes, probably.” We went to New York, where he was going to speak at the annual Al Smith dinner. You know, they have the candidates speak, and Reagan did his usual funny job, and Jimmy Carter screwed up there, too, by being serious.

The next day we had a meeting. By then the people had come in from Washington, so all of the top staff people in the campaign are there. We discussed it pro and con, and it turned out that there were only two people who didn’t want us to debate. One was Dick Wirthlin, who said the polls showed we were ahead. The other one was Bill Timmons, who was running the field operation. He said, “We just don’t need to call things to a halt. Things are going all right.” But Stu and I were saying, “Look, there’s no motion out there. You get an entirely different feel out
in the field than you do sitting in headquarters.” There was one guy sitting on the fence on that thing. That was Jim Baker, which figures.

When you guys interview Jim Baker if you want to say to him, you know Lyn Nofziger doesn’t think much of you, that’s all right with me.

**Riley:** That violates our usual rules.

**Nofziger:** If you’ve already talked to him and asked him about me, he probably said the same thing. So we decided to debate. Of course, before this he had debated John Anderson. You know, all you have to do is hold your own in these things, because nobody wins or loses these debates on points. They do it on perception. Since the press always thinks that Reagan is dumber than the other guy, just by holding his own, Reagan wins.

So we had beaten John Anderson rather handily, and, of course, thanks to Jimmy Carter first of all saying that he was talking to Amy about nuclear policy—you don’t ordinarily use your teenage daughter to advise you on nuclear policy. And when Reagan said, “There you go again,” in effect calling him a liar, and him not having any response to that—those two things just wiped him out. So it turned out to be a good thing that we debated. I think that we would have won anyway, but we won it a lot more handily because Reagan showed that he could stand up to the President of the United States.

**Knott:** Were you surprised at the magnitude of the victory?

**Nofziger:** Yes. I’m always surprised. I always think that we’re going to win it by one, if at all. I felt pretty good about it. I thought we would win. But sometimes you lose the ones you think you’re going to win. I didn’t think we would win that big.

**Riley:** Was there a lot of internal concern about a possible October surprise?

**Nofziger:** Yes, we talked about it a lot. In fact, Reagan talked about it, too, in some of his speeches. We thought very much that they would work a deal to turn those hostages loose in late October. Of course, you know [William] Casey and Bush were both accused of working to keep that from happening. If they did, I’m proud of them, but I don’t think they did. I think it just worked out that way.

That was the thing that we were concerned about. You know, Democrats are always very good, too, at coming out at the last minute and accusing us of hating old people, and we’re going to abolish Social Security, and that sort of thing. But as I recall, nothing in particular happened. The campaign just went on and on. And Reagan won.

**Knott:** Did you play a role in the transition?

**Nofziger:** No, I had told them that I didn’t want to be in the administration. I told Ed Meese that I was going to leave on November 15 and go home. He came back and said, “Will you stay ’til the first of December?” I said, “Yes, I’ll stay then. But then I want to go home.”
Then Jim Baker came around and said, “I’ve got a proposition for you. I want somebody to handle politics, on the political end as an Assistant to the President for Political Affairs,” or whatever he was calling it. At first I said no, and then I went and talked to Ed Meese and talked to him about it and decided maybe I should do that. So I went back to Jim Baker and said, “Let me think about it. Bonnie and I are driving home, and I’ll call you when I get home.” Well, we took ten, twelve days to drive across the country, leisurely, and when we got into the house, the phone is ringing, and it’s Baker. He’s calling from Jamaica or somewhere down there where he’s on vacation saying, “Have you made up your mind yet?” I said, “Yes, I’ll take it.”

**Riley:** No discussion of press—

**Nofziger:** No, I had made it very clear that I did not want to be the Press Secretary. I absolutely did not want to be. I must tell you in all honesty, I’m sure that if I had wanted to be and said to Reagan, “I want to be the Press Secretary,” I would have been. But there were a lot of people who were happier that I didn’t. I don’t think Baker would have been happy—although, at that particular time, I didn’t have any particular problems with Jim. Although I have decided that the reason he asked me to do that is that he needed some Reagan people in the White House.

We got in a fight one time, and he said, “Damn it, I brought you into the White House.” I didn’t say anything. He couldn’t have kept me out. No way in the world he could have kept me out. As I say, I think he asked me to come back because he needed some Reagan people there. He brought in his own people, who were pretty much non-Reagan people.

**Knott:** What was the difficulty between you and Baker?

**Nofziger:** I think he was not loyal to Reagan. I think he used the press to hurt other Reagan people. Ed Meese came over to see me during the summer of 1981, and he said, “Lyn, are they doing this on purpose?” The press had just been cutting him into little pieces. I laughed at him. I said, “Of course they’re doing it on purpose, Ed. These things just don’t happen.” He says, “What are we going to do?”

We wound up bringing in Jim Jenkins and so forth. You see, I think Jim Baker was using Ronald Reagan for his ends, and not for Reagan’s ends. He used the press. He spent an awful lot of time talking to the press, and you can go through some of those stories that you’ve got there where they’ve taken little shots at me. There was a time when I never figured out where they were coming from. Then I did. Obviously they would come from Jim Baker, or maybe from one of his guys like Dick Darman.

They were doing this with Meese, and they were doing this with [William] Clark. They were doing this with the old Reagan people. You know, after a while you begin to figure, Well, who needs this? But I really have some regrets. I told them when I went back I’d give them a year, and I did. I gave them a year and two days on account of I finished out the week.

I wish I had stayed longer. I really wish I had stayed pretty much through the first term, because I think I could have been helpful to the President. There were too many people in that White
House, I think, who thought that Reagan should do what they wanted done instead of doing what Reagan wanted done. That left Meese and Clark pretty much there alone.

**Knott:** Where does Deaver fit in this? He’s an old Reagan hand, but is he over on the Baker side of things?

**Nofziger:** Oh yes, yes. Have you read Meese’s book?

**Knott:** Yes.

**Nofziger:** There’s a little paragraph in there where— Mike falls in love with people—and I don’t mean that sexually—and he thought that Jim Baker was— Jim Baker was everything that Mike isn’t. He’s tall, he’s good looking, he’s rich. Jim is a very competent individual. I would never say that he’s dumb or anything else. But I just think he’s basically dishonest.

But Deaver sees all these black ties—Jim Baker and Dick Darman and [David] Gergen and those guys—and they’re all there together. He became very much enamored of them and thought that they were the right guys. He became very much a part of that clique. He went to Bill Clark and said, “Bill, if I go in and talk to the President again about getting rid of Ed Meese, would you go in with me?” Bill said, “Yes, I’ll go in with you, but I’ll argue against it.”

So then Deaver went in to the President and suggested that he fire both Clark and Meese. I’ve always found that kind of hard to believe. I suppose nobody found that harder to appreciate than either Clark or Meese, because Clark brought Deaver into the Governor’s office, made him his assistant when he became executive secretary. Meese kept him on, and without Clark and Meese, Deaver would be somewhere else doing other things—selling shoes, I always say.

So I’ve always felt that Deaver’s sense of loyalty was not very strong. But he was very close to Nancy and very close to Reagan, and I think—in his own mind—served them well. Some of us don’t quite think that. Whereas I would say that Baker probably had no second thoughts about knowing why he was there. Jim Baker was there for Jim Baker. I think Meese always thought he was there for the Reagans.

**Riley:** Can you tell us about your job, what your job description was, and what you spent most of your time doing?

**Nofziger:** Well, my job description initially was as the political guy to maintain contact with the national committee and the state committees and political people around the country and make sure that our political backside was covered. Then I got in there, and I found very quickly that the people who were running the personnel operation had no concept of the political part of government. They were looking for competent people. I tried to explain to them that the first thing you do is get loyal people, and competence is a bonus. I would tell them, “If you’re going to hire a Democrat, hire a dumb one, because a smart one can hurt you.” I feel very strongly about that.
The President is elected to do certain things. He has made certain promises, certain commitments. He has a certain philosophy of government. If you hire people who don’t believe that, and who at best are not going to work very hard for it and at worst are going to work against it, then you’re hurting. You’re hurting the guy you came to serve. So I got hold of the appointments process. I made them run all their Schedule C appointments through me. We went through them. Obviously, there’s nobody who could find them all, but I could find people who I knew had been anti-Reagan, and I could also find people they were ignoring who I knew had been Reagan people, and we could do something about that. Later we got a woman—Becky Norton Dunlop—who’s over at the Heritage Foundation now. We got her to go through all the Schedule C’s because she was much tougher than I am. Man, she didn’t put up with anything.

Riley: We may have to talk to this woman.

Nofziger: Yes, you really should.

Riley: We can find her.

Nofziger: But anyway, that’s what we did. We spent a lot of time making sure that Reagan people were getting into government, and that non-Reagan people were being kept out of government. I’d get calls from people saying, “You’ve got to put so-and-so in. She’s a Republican.” Or, “He’s a Republican.” I’d say, “Yes, and they worked against Reagan.” “You’ve got to put him in anyway.” Well, we never did.

Knott: Was this Baker-Meese division primarily over policy? Baker being more of a moderate Republican?

Nofziger: No, I think it was primarily because Baker wanted to be numero uno, and anything he could do to move Meese to one side or cut him down, he would do. I don’t think there was much in the way of policy. I think it was just Jim Baker wanting to control the place, and Meese was there as the guy who’d been closest to Reagan.

Knott: And the rap against Meese being a poor administrator. Was there anything to that?

Nofziger: Ed’s got a couple of problems. One, he’s got a briefcase that has never been emptied. I suppose you go to the bottom of it, and you can find stuff back in 1967-8. The other thing is it’s a good thing Ed was not born a woman because he can’t say no. I mean that in the nicest way. Ed will do anything in the world for you. He is one of the sweetest, nicest men in the whole damn world. But when you can’t say no, you take on more things than you can handle. The third thing is Ed likes to do things himself. He’s not a very good distributor of jobs and missions.

On the other hand, he did a pretty fine job for the Governor of California for—what, almost six years? He is a very smart guy, a very loyal guy. He had thought he would be the Chief of Staff. And in fairness, he probably should have been because he couldn’t have done it all himself. I mean, he would have had to spread it around. If it had been Meese and Clark in there—and Deaver too, because then Deaver wouldn’t have had a chance to go the other way—I think that
could have worked very well. I think Reagan was a great President. I think he could have been a
greater President if the people who wanted him to be a great President had been there.

Riley: Well, there was a role that you addressed in some of the earlier stuff that you did at the
Miller Center that defined Meese as an explainer or supervisor of meetings in California—

Nofziger: Oh yes, he was very good at that.

Riley: Did that continue when he came to Washington, or was there just not a role for it?

Nofziger: Oh, I’m sure he did some of it because there was always an early morning meeting
with Baker and Meese and, I guess, Deaver. I’m sure he would have done some of that. Meese,
as I think I said earlier, is a very detailed note-keeper. Anything you get from him, he probably
has it in notes.

Knott: How plugged in was the President as far as these internal battles?

Nofziger: Not very well. I went into him one day and said, “Mr. President, we’ve got to do
something about all these leaks. They’re hurting you.” They were leaks making other people
look good but making Reagan look bad and making it look like the place was divided. He said,
“Well, I would if I knew who was leaking.” I said, “I’ll give you a list.” I did, and nothing
happened. He didn’t like personnel problems, which is not unique among elected politicians.
Most of them don’t. I think they don’t like to make somebody mad because they’re afraid they’ll
vote against them.

I’ll give you one instance. A fellow named Dick Richards we named chairman of the Republican
National Committee. I’d known Dick for a long time, and he’s a good guy and is a pretty good
pol. But I thought he was doing a terrible job at the Republican National Committee. I went into
Jim Baker one day, and I said, “Jim, we’re going to have to get rid of Dick Richards.” He said,
“Let’s get Meese and Deaver in here, and we’ll talk about it.” They came in, and I talked about
it, told them why we had to get rid of Richards.

They agreed, but they said, “You’ve got to clear it with the President first.” So I went down and
talked to the President, and I said, “We’ve got to get rid of Dick Richards.” The President said,
“Well, really?” He didn’t like that. I said, “We really have to do it.” He said, “Make sure you
don’t hurt him.” I said, “Okay, we’ll find him another job.”

So I go back to the guys—Meese and Deaver and Baker—and say, “Okay, the President has
agreed, but he wants us to give him another job.” “Sure, no problem. We can make him maybe
Deputy Secretary of Interior.” Dick is from Utah.

So they offered this to Dick, and Dick turns it down. So nothing happens except that Bob Novak
runs a story quoting me damn near word-for-word on all this, which didn’t make my old friend
Dick Richards very happy. Where did it come from? I knew it wouldn’t come from Meese, and I
was sure it wouldn’t come from Deaver. But where would it come from? Jim Baker. Baker had
said in there, “Now remember, what we say in this room has to stay in this room.” So anyway, that was one of my earlier indications that Mr. Baker was using things for his own benefit.

**Knott:** How did that resolve itself?

**Nofziger:** It resolved itself because they have a two-year term. Ordinarily you can get re-elected for a term or two, but we made sure that he was not re-elected, that’s all. I haven’t seen him in years, but I’m sure that probably, in the back of his mind, he says, “That son of a bitch,” which I could understand. I don’t have any problems with that. I have problems with Jim Baker.

**Riley:** When you were in your capacity of dealing with the party out in the country, were you picking up signals of concern during that first year that Baker and his people were guiding the President in the wrong direction?

**Nofziger:** Oh, there were concerns from the very beginning. I mean, they look and they say, “What’s this Bush guy doing in here? What are these Ford people doing in here? Where the hell are the Reagan people?” Yes, there was concern. The conservatives out there pretty generally thought I was kind of their savior, and if it weren’t for me, things would be a lot worse. And frankly, they would have been.

They really never got over it. There was always this feeling that there were people in the White House who didn’t belong there and who weren’t serving the President well and who were not part of the Reagan team. That’s absolutely true. That goes back to what I said. If the Reagan people could have controlled the White House, then Reagan would have been a better President.

I go back and I look at the Iran-Contra thing. What people don’t really understand is that by the time that came along, Reagan was dealing with people who didn’t know him, and he didn’t know them. They had come into the second administration, and they had no idea how he thought or how he worked.

Reagan tends to trust people who work for him. He says, “Okay, you work for me, obviously you have my best interests at heart.” Kind of a flaw there. Some people have their own best interests at heart. I think that’s what happened there. Had Meese been in the White House instead of over at Justice, had Bill Clark still been there—hell, had Mike Deaver and Jim Baker still been there, because Baker would have looked at this and said, “This is not in my best interest.” Deaver would have said to the President, “Mr. President, you can’t do this.”

But all those people were gone. Apparently both Cap [Caspar Weinberger] and George Shultz were saying this was wrong, but they didn’t make their case. But I think Meese and Deaver and Baker, Clark, myself—we could have all made that case.

**Knott:** Did you have the impression early on that Nancy Reagan was—since she was so close to Michael Deaver—also sort of in agreement with Baker—?
Nofziger: Yes, very much so. I think so. Nancy likes stylish people, and Baker certainly is, on the surface, a class act. The other people they brought in, they’re Ivy Leaguers and that kind of thing, and I think Nancy was impressed by him.

Knott: I’m wondering if I could get you to talk about a specific event, and that was the assassination attempt. You’ve talked about this at length in other venues, so maybe there’s nothing new here. You played a very prominent role that day.

Nofziger: I had been out to lunch with some people who wanted to talk to me about politics. I came back to the office, and a guy named Joe Holmes walked in the office right after me and said, “Somebody took a shot at the President.” I said, “Did they hit him?” He says, “I don’t think so, but they may have hit Jim Brady and somebody else.”

So I went over and turned on the television set. Every office in the White House has a television set. Of course, there was utter confusion on there. We were watching it for a few minutes, and Frank Reynolds finally says, in utter exasperation, “Doesn’t anybody here know what’s going on?” or “Dammit, doesn’t anybody—”

So about this time I said, “Maybe I had better go on over. It looks like Jim Brady has been shot, so I better go over to Baker’s office and see if there’s something I can do to help.” So I went over there, and there’s Meese and Baker and a couple of other people standing around, talking about it. I said, “Well, thank God, Reagan wasn’t shot.” Baker said, “It looks like he was now.” I said, “What can I do?” Meese said, “Lyn, why don’t you and I go over to the hospital?”

Baker couldn’t bear to be left out, so he said, “I’ll go along too.” So they called Baker’s car. Larry Speakes, the deputy press secretary, was there, so we take him along. And I, having been around the White House longer than any of these guys, and being smarter than they are, I get in the front seat. There’s more room in the front seat. These three guys crowd in the back, one of my little victories. We get out to the hospital, and it’s the kind of day that’s raining off and on, clouds are coming in. They’ve thrown up some barricades there. So the rest of these guys go in the hospital, and I go to talk to the press at the barricades. I said, “Look, we don’t know anything. As soon as we know something, we’ll let you know.” They asked a few questions, which I couldn’t answer.

I went into the emergency room, and I ran into one of the advance men there. I said, “You know, you ought to be taking notes, and you ought to go home and get a tape recorder and talk all this into a tape recorder, because this is going to be historical.” I don’t know whether he ever did or not, but I grabbed some pieces of paper from the nurses’ station there, the forms with the blanks.

And I began jotting down notes, these things that Reagan had said—or it was reported to us that he said—such as to Nancy, “On the whole, I would rather be in Philadelphia.” Paul Laxalt had come over, so there was Meese—Oh, and we had sent Speakes back to the White House to handle the press there, which was proper. Somebody had to be there. It was decided that he would do that, and I would handle the press at the hospital.
So Laxalt and Meese and Baker and I are standing there, and they bring Reagan out of this little emergency room where they’ve had him, and they’re going to take him into the operating room. As they wheel him by on the gurney, he says— Baker said he winked at me. I never saw him wink, but I’ll take that. Reagan did say, “Who’s minding the store?” I learned later, of course, that the doctors had cut his suit off of him. Now, Reagan’s kind of a tightwad, and he was just furious, “You’re ruining my suit.” To hell with the fact that I’m dying, you’re ruining my suit.

Anyway, they get him in there, and, of course, the word comes out that he has also said, “I hope you’re all Republicans,” which they weren’t. And I have written all these things down, and I decide I’m going to have to get a doctor to do some briefing. I don’t want the White House doctor, because I think that people will think that he’s got something to hide. This is nothing against him. I just didn’t think that— I didn’t want the surgeons who were operating on him, because I thought they were too close to it and wouldn’t have the bigger picture.

So I went to whoever it was there who was running the hospital, and said, “I need a doctor who can talk to this stuff.” He got me a guy named Dennis O’Leary, who had talked to people before on other things, and who was an MD, but was doing administrative work. Dennis O’Leary, he’s in Chicago now. Then I had the hospital set me aside a room. There was a kind of a large lecture hall, and I called the phone company and said, “I’ve got to have phones in here right away.” And they were wonderful. They had phones in there within an hour. Of course, that was in the days before cell phones and all this other stuff.

I had my first briefing by myself and went in and talked to the press and took their questions. I had stuffed in my pocket these notes of all the things Reagan had said, but I completely forgot them. I finished the briefing, and I started to walk away, and somebody—I believe in angels, so I think there was an angel there, I really do—but somebody, I don’t know who it was, said, “Did the President have anything to say?”

I said, “Oops.” And I went back to the podium, and I pulled out my notes. It was those things that really told the country that things were going to be all right. It wasn’t me. It was the fact that Reagan had said these things. I always say, “God bless the guy out in that audience among the press who said, ‘Did he have anything to say?’” So a while later, I guess an hour or so later, they had Reagan out of surgery, and I had O’Leary come out, and he briefed them all on that, thoroughly, and did a wonderful job.

After that was over, by this time I’d talked to Nancy briefly, and she had gone back to the White House. She had come over there, and she had spent a lot of time comforting Sarah Brady. O’Leary and I went up to meet with the doctor who had operated on Brady, and he was elated. He said, “You know, when I first looked at the X-rays, I thought this guy at most would be a vegetable if he lived. I got inside there, and it wasn’t as bad as it looked in the X-rays. Now I think there’ll probably be something wrong, but it’s possible he could recover entirely.”

We got to talking about it, and he said, “You know, the interesting thing about this is, if they recover, and they begin to improve, you can never tell how far they’re going to go toward complete recovery. But if they ever stop improving, they don’t start again. That’s the end of it. He could still be a vegetable, but he could still be completely well.”
A number of years later—seven or eight years later, because I had been over at Georgetown Hospital to see a friend—I ran into this doctor in the hallway. We got to talking, and I said, “Is Jim Brady still improving?” He said, “Yes, he’s still improving.”

Obviously, he has probably stopped now, but I thought that was interesting, that over all those years Jim kept getting a little bit better and a little bit better. And you know, the tragedy of that is, the only thing Jim Brady ever wanted to be was the President’s Press Secretary. And he’d have been a very good one. He was smart, he was sharp, he was witty. He got along well with the press. He was experienced.

I got home that night—we were still living in an apartment over in Skyline—and I walked into the apartment. Bonnie was there with one of her close friends, and I noticed she’d been crying. And me, in my soft, sweet way, said, “What have you been crying for? Nobody shot me.” And she said, “I’ve been thinking of how many times you were standing where Jim Brady was standing.” I said, “Oops, I never thought of that.” It never even occurred to me.

Anyway, I went back to the White House after the last briefing, and I said to Baker, “Jim, I’ve got to go talk to the press now,” about Brady and so forth. He said, “I don’t want you to.” I said, “Well, I’ve got to do it.” He said, “I don’t want any television.” He was afraid I was going to get some publicity, honest to God. It took me a while to figure that one out. So I went and talked to the press, told them about Brady, and the next day Speakes took over, and I went back to my job. Is that what you wanted?

Knott: That’s great. So you left after your first year, and you stayed true to your pledge. Any wavering at all?

Nofziger: No, not really. It wasn’t until later until I thought, in retrospect. I went back, of course, in August for a couple of weeks. It was July or August.

Knott: I have the date in front of me. For the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act?

Nofziger: Yes, the worst damn bill that Reagan ever signed. You know, it was funny. I and some other people had come out strongly against it. So I guess Baker went in and complained to the President that, “Nofziger’s opposing you on this.” So I got a call from, I guess Deaver, saying, “The President wants to see you.” I go down, and they’ve invited me and Marty Anderson—who by this time is gone also, poor guy.

The President is pretending to be mad and saying, “You should at least talk to me first.” And I said, “Yes, I should have, but you know— I’ll promise you I won’t say anything further about this. I won’t mention it again.” Then my friend Jim Baker sandbagged me good. He said, “Mr. President, why don’t you ask him to come down and run the campaign to pass this bill?”

The President looked at me, and I’m saying to myself, Oh, Lord. I said, “I’m supposed to go to”— I was on some damn committee that was supposed to go over to Europe. Reagan says, “We can get you something else, something later. Well, would you?” And I said, “I will do it, but I
have to have control of this thing. If I’m going to do this thing, and if I’m going to betray all my friends out there, then I’ve got to have control of it because I’ve got to win.” Bad enough to betray your friends, but if you betray your friends and lose—

They did that. They gave me complete control of it. We went in there and did the thing that had to be done, and we won it. It was funny. Regular old Reagan people would come in, and Reagan would want to talk to them. And I was proud of several of them because they came in. Reagan would say, “You’ve got to do it,” and they’d say, “Look, Mr. President, this is the thing you opposed all your life. We’re the true Reaganites here.” We started out, I’ve forgotten, with not very many votes, and we wound up with more than enough.

**Riley:** Did you reflect back on this experience in 1990 when George Bush was getting beat up for reneging on his no new taxes? How do you explain Reagan?

**Nofziger:** Well, it was a different matter. In the first place, Reagan did this in the middle of his first year. In the second place, George Bush signed that damn bill about a week before the election and cost us seats in the House and Senate. Not only that, Reagan had never said, “Read my lips, no new taxes.” It was implicit that we weren’t going to have any taxes, but George Bush had been so adamant about it in his speech at the convention that it just made him look like an absolute liar.

As I say, Ed Rollins by this time was over at the congressional committee, and he sent out a memo to all his candidates saying, “Pay no attention to the President. Oppose this.” George Bush has hated him ever since.

**Knott:** We’re almost at the end, but you came back in 1984 for a while—

**Nofziger:** I came back for the campaign.

**Knott:** Right. Any recollections from that?

**Nofziger:** It was important to me that Reagan be re-elected, and I was not hired on to the campaign. I went back as a volunteer and had an office over there. It had a picture of George Bush on the wall, a big poster, which I put a mustache on. They brought George in to show him that. I did a lot of work on that campaign, made a lot of speeches, held press conferences. I advised the people in various segments of the campaign. I spent full time on it and really was very happy. Stu Spencer came to me—he was back there, taking a nominal fee, I think $5,000 a month—and said, “You know, you really ought to take some money from this. Otherwise there’s something in the campaign law.” I said, “I don’t see it,” and I didn’t take any money. Being a volunteer gives you a lot of leeway. It worked very well.

It’s hard for me to remember specific things.

**Knott:** Were you involved in that first debate at all, the preparation?
Nofziger: No, I hate those things, so I always stayed away from being involved in preparation. But I tell you, they asked us to go over there and spin the results, and after that debate I said, “I can’t.” I got out of there. I couldn’t lie. Reagan stunk up the place. That was just a terrible result. Of course, the second one was great. But in the first one, he looked tired, he looked old, they had beat him up in the practice sessions. They didn’t understand how to prepare Reagan. You prepare Reagan lightly. You joke and kid and one thing and another, and they were beating him up. It doesn’t work very well.

I hate to break this up, fellas. If you want to come back again sometime, you can.

Knott: Really? Thank you. We make take you up on that. Thank you very much.

Riley: We really appreciate it.